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Art and Society According to John Ruskin

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ART AND SOCIETY
ACCORDING TO JOHN RUSKIN

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CHAPTER I

THE CRITICISM OF RUSKIN'S WORK

The Catholic teacher of English literature has a perpetual problem set before him. He must forever try to enliven a Catholic culture in the minds of those given into his charge, and he must forever do this by offering them the fruits of a non-Catholic culture. He knows that literature is not a thing separate from the rest of man's life, that it is only a way of viewing the same thing that the science of theology, and the sciences generally, that the whole cult and practice of religion regard - that whole reality: God, Man, the relations between God and Man, between man and man, between man and the world about him. And yet the Catholic teacher must try to develop toward this reality an attitude in his students, a culture that is Catholic, by the reading and interpreting of an attitude toward this reality which is now partially, now totally, different from his and objectively false. The Catholic teacher must teach a largely non-Catholic English literature.

He cannot, I say, teach literature as a pleasant thing quite divorced from the fundamental culture of the Catholic, a thing to be enjoyed all by itself and worth the study of youth simply for its own sake. He cannot say to youth: "Here are the beautiful thoughts, the interesting play of mind, the interpretations of

experience of the best minds that have been recorded in English literature. Of course, much of it is utterly false; some of it indeed is half-truth; some of it might be taken as true if you read into it a Catholic sense. But it is stimulating to meet such minds and to consider such a variety of thought. Do not, therefore, trouble yourself with the error; consider only that it is all human; and 'nil humani . . .'."

Nor can the Catholic teacher set himself down before an airy abstraction called "style" and find that he can see it, handle it, separate it from a literary work for the edification of his charges. He may well believe that no such distinction is possible, and say with Newman that "Thought and speech are inseparable from each other. Matter and expression are parts of one; style is a thinking out into language." He may say to the youth before him that he cannot talk to them of a master's style as something really distinct from his thought, that he cannot speak to them of the master's "choice of words", his "command of language" when all he really means is the command of a wealth of concepts for which those words stand- concepts which reflect their author's philosophy of life, his religious views, his knowledge of history, his understanding of men and of himself. As these concepts, thoughts, views are Catholic or as they are atheist, agnostic, materialist, humanitarian, so the teacher must present them. He cannot prescind from them by talking of the author's style.

Again, the Catholic teacher cannot ease himself of his problem by offering his pupils the history of literature. He would

then turn the study of literature into a study of history, however interesting and instructive the latter may be. Since the day Samuel Johnson and, later, Hazlitt proposed that a better understanding of literary works could be had from understanding the minds of those who wrote them, this shifting of interest from the work itself to the man who produced it has been going on; it now has so much the greater share of attention in the schools that the Catholic teacher, beset by his own problem, might easily beguile himself with this easy solution and devote himself to the history of literary movements and the psychology of the great authors.

No, there is no way out by the study of "style" or by the study of history and biography and psychological analysis. The teacher and student must sink their teeth in the meat, the solid substance of the literature itself. And it is for the Catholic teacher of English literature to find some way of treating it so that this mass of intellectual food, grown by a non-Catholic culture, can nourish in Catholic youth- for whom Catholic schools and universities are painfully supported- a truly Catholic culture.

With one instance of this problem, which perpetually and everywhere meets the Catholic teacher of English literature, this study is concerned - the work of John Ruskin.

1.

The Problem: What Can a Catholic Teacher Make of John Ruskin?

It is not intended that this study will be made the occasion

to celebrate a sort of moral atmosphere in which Ruskin is supposed by some to have enveloped his aesthetics and his economics. It is true that this atmosphere seems to them to be the most distinctive contribution that Ruskin made to the thought of the nineteenth century; it is that which perhaps appealed most in Ruskin to a generation beginning to tire of mechanistic, deterministic, economic views and finding itself rather fed up with an art that had ceased to have much meaning; and again it is that which has brought so much ridicule on Ruskin, perhaps as much in his own day as in ours. It is, however mistakenly, the most obvious feature of Ruskin's mind and work to many readers, and from first to last has been the subject of praise or blame, the object of his friends' tender defense and of his critics' most scornful attack. It is then quite uncalled for that once again should be demonstrated that Ruskin saw in some cloudy way that great art was the product of great souls, great in their truthfulness, their purity, their faith in God; that Ruskin had a sentiment that there was more at work in the economic activities of men than a blind selfishness, however "enlightened"; that, as a sort of supreme and unique achievement Ruskin's "moral sense" saw in both art and economics their dependence one on the other and described it in that famous chapter from The Stones of Venice, "The Nature of Gothic." That passage alone, and indeed the whole tenor of Ruskin's controlling ideas, might seem a sufficient recommendation to the Catholic teacher who is suspected of asking only a "moral" to make him happy in his literary preferences. But this

atmosphere of thought, or this tenor of it, or this one great moral intuition of Ruskin, if it may be allowed to reduce his doctrine to a single principle, is not, it must be emphatically asserted, the formal object of this study.

That Ruskin's "moral" temper, his blanketing of economics and art in a shining mist of moral sentiment, is the object of study here is denied so emphatically simply because it may so easily be confused with what is the proper aim of this work. Here we are concerned with something more realistic, something both wider in its scope and deeper in all its implication, something rational and real - emphatically not a matter of moral sentiment. What then is conceived to be the proper object of this investigation may be put thus: Is there in Ruskin's thought a supernatural element that in any way corresponds to the Catholic teacher's and the Catholic student's Catholic culture - a culture which is supernatural in its very principle of life and which looks for a recognition of that supernatural in the literature and other forms of art which it makes use of?

This supernatural element, whether or not it exists in Ruskin, is not, it must be repeated, to be confused vaguely with any "moral" concept of art, or economics. It is, first of all, something real, not a sentiment; again it is something more than mere rational ethics; it is something which natural powers are not enough to achieve. On the other hand, morality, at least as it is so frequently understood to be mere natural ethics or mere sentiment, is quite within the range of man's natural powers.

A man can speak the truth, or make his artistic productions "truthful" out of a truth-loving heart; a man may be pure and create works of art that breathe of purity; a man may love justice and flame into wrath at sight of the injustices he sees in the society around him, and yet do all this by the powers of his own nature, of his intellect that can know truth and see what is just and recognize that purity is finer than impurity, of his will that can embrace all these good things that are proposed to it.

But there are, it must be insisted, thoughts and desires, knowledge and wisdom, that are in all truth a normal part of the Christian's life, which are beyond these natural powers. That a man may by the natural strength of his mind and will, at this time or that, maintain his purity, or his honesty, or be just or even generous, is true; but that so many men, and for so long a time as Christianity has witnessed, can maintain themselves in virtue is, in the technical sense, "morally impossible" without the special help of God. And more to the special point of this study, is this: There are ideas and truths afloat now in the world, accepted by many millions, that would not be current were it not for that divine interposition by which they were first revealed to the world and maintained in men's minds, who never would for so long or at such great cost have supported them. These are, first of all, the truths of revelaed religion, and secondarily those which most concern us in this study, ideas and views of the conduct of Christian society and of its many offices

of statesman, and priest, and craftsman, and merchant, and artist.

Do we find such thought in Ruskin? Do we find in him the principles, the tone, the applications of greater truths to particular situations of the statesman, the laborer, or the artist that are the fruit in him, not only of a personal genius, but of a grace that has come to him, at least mediately, from a great supernatural tradition? Is he then one to whom we, who are of this Christian tradition, can look for the support and development of our culture?

At first thought, when all of Ruskin that has been read has been recalled and when all that has been read about him is reviewed, the answer to this question seems quite clear and inevitable: Ruskin never reached such heights or sounded such depths. Who indeed would look for the supernatural, for what is specifically of the Catholic culture, in a man who passed his formative years under the strict Calvinism of his mother, who was later, under the battering of the world's atheism and materialism, to reject all belief in revealed religion, and whose final views, disputed by those who have sought to interpret him, were those of the Deist and the Humanitarian, or, at most, of a diluted Protestantism? Or what Catholic teacher would seriously consider proposing to young minds as part of, or consistent with, Catholic tradition the ravings of a "manic depressive", as one recent critic would make out Ruskin to be? Or dare to take seriously the sentimental and weak-minded thinker, as J. M.Robertson describes him?

2.

The Criteria of the Catholic Teacher.

What is the Catholic teacher to make of such people as Ruskin? Well, he can interpret them, or read into them, or patiently dig out of them that residue of the old Catholic tradition that does truly live on in our civilization, no matter how diluted has become the Protestantism which was its immediate heir, or however materialistic, atheist, or agnostic have become those who have written our books. For Christianity did bring into the world a view of man and of God and the relations between them, and especially of the relations of man and man, that was a supernatural phenomenon in itself, a view of these things that never could have been accepted in a society that had remained pagan, views of the "value of each human soul" that a pagan philosopher here and there might have conceived, but which the mass of men could by no moral possibility accept, views of the place of woman, and her dignity as mother and wife, views of the dignity of labor and of the laboring man, a new valuation of chastity, of charity, of the state, of the home. And these views remain today, or rather some residue of them, even in poetry of the pantheist or the economics of the materialist. And accordingly as he finds this residue, as it retains the marks of Christ's inspiration on it, the Catholic teacher can use it.

There are in general two ways in which this residue of Catholic thought can be recovered. The first way is to find it in some of those words and phrases which once conveyed a clear

Catholic sense, words and phrases which became so much a part of the familiar speech of the common man and of the intellectual alike that they have maintained themselves in our literature even when their original sense has been lost or partially dissolved in the philosophies of our times. The other way is to find it beneath those modern formulas of materialistic philosophies, words and phrases which are the jargon of the day and carry no memories of the ancient religious view of things, and yet represent aspirations of the human mind and heart which no utterly pagan society or utterly pagan philosophy would ever have had. Of these two ways of reading into our literature something that the Catholic mind can embrace here are some simple examples.

Near the end of "Rabbi Ben Ezra" Browning writes:

> Look not thou down but up!
> To uses of a cup,
> The festal board, lamp's flash, and trumpet's peal,
> The new wine's foaming flow,
> The Master's lips aglow!
> Thou, heaven's consummate cup . . .

Surely no poet who had not the Christian, and originally Catholic, tradition of the chalice of Christ's blood, drunk first by the Master, to be drunk "new" some day in heaven, the Sacrifice in imitation of which the Christian can offer up himself to God, as the poet suggests, - surely no poet without some such tradition in the recesses of his mind would have written these lines. And surely, little though Browning believed in this chalice and in the Sacrifice, yet the words with all their original meaning waken in the Catholic mind far more than was in the poet's.

Let the word "humanitarian" be an example of a modern concept, strictly in itself and implications the product of godless philosophies, that is yet only possible to the godless because once men were enabled by the supernatural grace of God to conceive certain beliefs about the nature of man and of the relations of man with man. The worship of humanity is today possible only because once God impressed on the world that men - all men! - were more than animals, that they had been created in His image, and had been raised to a supernatural state. And so today behind the word "humanitarian" and all the jargon of the cult of humanity, the Catholic can read the high truth from which the modern thinker has fallen.

And in this way the Catholic teacher may make something of John Ruskin. He cannot of course accept everything Ruskin has to say as wholly consistent with his own beliefs. Finding so much of interest and value, he will yet be ready either to correct what is wrong, or to understand what is vague or apparently inconsistent in the sense of his own more precise theology or philosophy. He will do this, not out of any "personal" interpretation nor with meticulous attention to every possible philosophical or theological implication, but interested in what he can get out of Ruskin's thought as it is, knowing that that thought has often been obscured and hindered by ideas and terminology current in Ruskin's day. What these were and what allowances he must make for them he will find in the general knowledge he has of the history of the times.

Obviously the first consideration in judging a system which was so greatly Christian is to know what to allow for in the religious belief which inspired and governed its development. Ruskin's was the diluted and obscure Christianity which had survived through three centuries of Protestantism. On the one hand the rejection of authoritative teaching in the Church had opened two lines of thought: the way to scepticism and agnosticism, to atheism or to Deism, and the way to assertiveness of personal opinions of all kinds on religious matters. On the other hand the departure from the sacramental life of the Church, especially the rejection of the Eucharist, led to the forgetting of the supernatural life of Christians and, again, to a stress on natural virtues and conduct so that religion tended to be simply morality.

The last confusion still shows itself in such a critic as Ladd, who seems to think Ruskin's aesthetics a matter of morality, as even Ruskin himself apparently thought when he wrote ". . . I w holly deny that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual nor intellectual, but moral . . ."[1] But all the other weaknesses of nineteenth century Protestantism are reflected in Ruskin's thought, that is, in his own religious beliefs. Without the authoritative teaching of the Church he was ready for doubts and they eventually overcame his early Calvinism, and left him eventually what some have taken for a Deist and Humanitarian. The lack of realization of the full supernatural life of the Christian reduces him often to mere humanitarianism, and the Catholic reader

[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 42.

must be ready to read Ruskin's statements in his own sense when they are susceptible to it.For instance,he does not seem aware of the tremendous force that would be added to his social theories by explicitly recognizing Christian society to be bound together supernaturally in Christ,though all he says is,as far as it goes,in accordance with that supernatural view. Again, the experiences of the beautiful might have been realized as actual graces given for the better living of the supernatural life, an understanding of them which the Catholic reader can supply for himself. His constant use of the term "moral" suggests a narrowness of his whole view which other elements in this exposition plainly disprove.

His religious history is neatly summarized by R.H.Wilenski thus:

> Evangelical until he was thirty-nine years old, in 1858.
> Sceptic from 1858 to 1874, when he was fifty-five.
> Broadminded Protestant from 1874 to the end.[1]

But the real formation of his mind took place in that first period, when the strong Calvinism of his mother had its hold on him. Both mind and style - or rather, to say with Newman, both together - were formed by the "steadily read chapters, morning and evening," of the Bible. The watchful presence of his mother in the town of Oxford protected even his student days from any contamination, so that Leslie Stephen writes:

> Ruskin, we may note, was at Oxford during the most exciting period of the movement. His ablest contemporaries were all going through the Newman fever. Ruskin

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[1] R. H. Wilenski, John Ruskin, an Introduction to Further Study of His Life and Work, p. 329 .

> seems never to have been aware that such a person as Newman existed. He amused himself with geology and botany, and seems to have been as blind as became the son of a sound Evangelical wine merchant to the very existence of any spiritual ferment.[1]

Of the doubts which came later and their effect on his thought there will be discussion later; only here it may be asserted that there was no such radical change as ever made it necessary for him to disown the view of life originated in this first period.

What in particular went into that set of religious, philosophical,and social principles so indeterminately "humanitarian"? Whose were the ideas? Carlyle's first of all, would be the answer. Following Ruskin's own statements, often repeated, that Carlyle was his master,[2] Lippincott summarizes the influence:

> If he was a learner from Plato and Xenophon, he was a disciple of Carlyle. Next to his mother Carlyle was the strongest influence of his life . . . The message of Sartor and Heroes aroused him, he says, "to do something, to be something useful." Of all Carlyle's writing, Past and Present and Latter-Day Pamphlets influenced him most . . . Though Ruskin already held many of the social, authoritarian and aristocratic ideas that Carlyle advocated, Carlyle, it seems, strengthened his belief in them, added to them, and made them more articulate.[3]

F. W. Roe says much the same, and with something of the same implication: that the thought of Carlyle was received into a mind that was not only disposed to receive it, but could digest it,

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[1] Leslie Stephen, Studies of a Biographer, p. 85.

[2] Works, Vol. XII, p. 507.

[3] B. E. Lippincott, Victorian Critics of Democracy, pp. 62, 63.

turn it over, mingle it with ideas already possessed, and form it all into a new body of thought that was simply Ruskin - no mere disciple of a master, then, however humbly Ruskin so confessed himself. The influence of Carlyle, says Roe,[1] began early in Ruskin's life, especially through Past and Present and Latter-Day Pamphlets. Both were hero-worshipers , both held the "gospel of work," both held the foundation of all religion is in resolving to do one's work well, both believed in the plain dictates of conscience that "courage, chastity, and honesty and patience, bring out good, and cowardice, and luxury and folly and impatience, evil;" both believed that man has "that singular force anciently called a soul;" both looked backward to a medieval age for suggestions of a new social order. We see in all this simply the influence that one original mind has on another - the power to receive and digest another's thought does not imply discipleship.

One might trace to Cobbett with as much justification all Ruskin's protest against the destruction of medieval civilization, for Ruskin himself said, ". . . please get Cobbett's little History of the Reformation, the only true one ever written as far as it reaches . . ."[2], and in another letter during a correspondence in the years 1884 and 1885 he says, ". . . the sum of my forty-four years of thinking on the matter . . . has led me to

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[1] F. W . Roe, The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin, p. 144.

[2] Works, Vol. XXXVII, p. 503.

agree with Cobbett in all his main ideas . . ." and ". . . what I say at Oxford must be the sum of my present conclusion, which Cobbett accurately though vulgarily expressed."[1]

That while Ruskin was at Oxford he was nowise influenced by Newman may be true; yet it seems impossible that he heard nothing of that attempt to reach the Christianity that was England's before Calvinism and Lutheranism dominated all its belief - surely an attempt that would have enlisted Ruskin's sympathies on one side of his interests. But at least in that sanctuary of the classics he came to know the great thought of the distant past. And yet, as many men of all ages have fed on those thoughts and have themselves become philosophers of very divergent views, so too much stress need not be given them as "sources" of Ruskin. That he read Plato and Aristotle is only to say that he was introduced to the ABC's of thought and not to say that he was indebted to them as his special sources. But another opinion may be expressed:

> . . . the study of the Republic and the Laws exercised a strong influence on him in later years. He was to follow Plato's conception of justice; each man fulfilling the function for which he was best fitted, and each man in his place. Plato's emphasis on the wisdom of the few and the unwisdom of the mass, as well as his emphasis on authority, supported attitudes, if not ideas, in which Ruskin had been trained and to which his temperament naturally inclined him. Xenophon's Economist, long a favorite with Ruskin, was the foundation of his studies in political economy. Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle all taught him that economics cannot be separated from other social studies, that it is a subordinate branch of the great art of politics . . . as he later said, he wanted to recall to modern

[1] Works, Vol. XXXVII, p. 503.

minds the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle.[1]

And so of the many thinkers and writers of all ages whom Ruskin here and there refers to, and praises, whose thoughts he accepts, we can say even more truly than of his "discipleship" of Carlyle, that like all men he has learned from others. That they are to be considered as his originals is hardly true. It is Ruskin's digest of them and "making them his own", as Newman describes the process, that we have before us, not a piece of Plato, another of Carlyle, third of Locke, and so on. But it is worth while to remember that he has read all these works, and that he is a Protestant in the nineteenth century, that he became sceptical of Christianity for a time, and even when belief returned to him, he could not again attach himself to any "religion of dogmas". But, as a man of his time with a heritage of Christianity, his language and thought is not without its echoes of the true Faith. And these we can hear.

3.

Light from Ruskin's Critics: Their Method

Now the Catholic teacher, faced with the problem whether Ruskin has anything to say to Catholic students, is assured by the masters in the teaching of literature that he must not depend on his theological and philosophical training, his acquaintance with history or economics as these may have come to him, that his powers of judgment so formed are inadequate, that he must go to

[1] B. E. Lippincott, op. cit., pp. 60, 61.

specialists in literary studies, and, equipped with a bibliography of their works, he must sit at the feet of these critics and from their wisdom learn to make a scholarly decision.

The process, if followed out, and if followed trustfully and hopefully, will prove disillusioning. The critics of Ruskin will not help him much to understand what Ruskin had to say and to put a value on it. Their failure may be traced to two general causes. The one may be called the academic, or the attitude of literary scholarship; the other may be described as philosophic.

The attitude of literary scholarship is to center attention far too much on Ruskin the man, his "personality", in modern jargon, his qualities of mind; rather than to attend first of all to what he had to say. This attitude in its extreme may lead to the discovery of elements of character that have not the remotest bearing on the truth or value of Ruskin's thought. Such an attitude is a perversion of literary study. It may be explained, but not excused. It began in the critical theories of Samuel Johnson, taken up by Hazlitt, then by Sainte Beuve, that a man's work can be better understood by understanding first of all the man himself - a theory which can be accepted with a distinction: it is true, if we wish to know simply what was on the author's mind when he wrote; but false, if we look first of all for the meaning of his words, supposing him as a matter of course to have been able to express what was on his mind. Studies made according to such critical notions may be interesting biography or history, but they easily miss the formal object of literary study - the

literature itself.

The most extreme of Ruskin's critics who would judge him by his "personality" is Reginald Howard Wilenski. His was indeed the most promising of introductions, the expression of the eager desire of a great admirer to dispose of certain superficial objections to a profound thinker:

> . . . It seemed impossible to capture his central attitude . . . Sometimes his dicta appeared part of a system, sometimes they seemed merely capricious . . . passages that revealed the wide range of real imaginative vision and others which were obviously pettish and parochial . . . These threads - grouped ideas in fields of art, social economics and war - seemed to me so vital and serviceable at the present time . . ."[1]

But this hope for a reasonable solution by a reasonable critic was immediately dashed - and forever - by the following:

> I discovered that there is hardly a page of his writings which can be properly apprehended until it is collated with the conditions of his mind, the circumstances of his life, not only at the general period within which the books fall, but on the actual day on which that particular page was written. There can be no doubt that Ruskin was . . . a mental invalid all his life . . . he appears to me to have suffered continuously from the malady now known to psychiatry as Manic-depression. I am no psychologist . . . I speak therefore under correction . . . The object of this inquiry is . . . to indicate a way of studying his writings that makes every word in them comprehensible.[2]

And from this beginning to the end of a quite extensive study Ruskin is studied, his work is examined, in this light only. Ruskin, who is read at all only because his mind is great enough to attract the attention of the Wilenskis as well as the rest of us, is called a madman; his work is pulled to pieces to show the

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[1] Op. cit., p. 9.
[2] Ibid., pp. 10, 11.

intimate workings of a manic-depressive. If indeed the works of Ruskin are sane enough to have held the attention of sane men for nearly a hundred years, of what use is it to discover that their author was insane? The work stands; it has never been called the raving of a madman; it cannot be called raving now. The author is dead; if he was insane, it is now only a matter of pity; we cannot lock him up now to see that he does not write another Stones of Venice. And this great clue to the unsuspected mystery of Ruskin has been discovered by a man who admits he is not a psychologist! And if he had only delayed the announcement of his discovery till the end of the book . . . As it is, the book is only a protracted anti-climax.

How much crazier was Ruskin than the rest of us may be seen in other bits of Wilenski's analysis. "He was always something of an exhibitionist . . . He always wore unusual and conspicuous blue ties."[1] Only an amateur psychitrist could have damned a man for liking blue ties with the devastating word "exhibitionist"; But why he should consider blue ties relevant to an understanding of, say, "The Nature of Gothic" is quite beyond comprehension.

Another discovery that could have been made only after the modern psychologist discovered human nature is also Wilenski's. Ruskin stressed the "doctrine that all interest on money is usury . . . a rationalization, of course, of his own position at the end of the 'seventies when . . . . he no longer had dividends . . ."[2] Again,

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[1] Ibid., p. 34.

[2] Ibid., p. 298.

what Ruskin's personal concern in the matter had to do with the truth or error of the doctrine on usury, is hard to see. Perhaps the unsuspected relevancy is in the word "rationalization", a concept utterly unknown to generations of men until now. A last sample of this valuable criticism of Wilenski's is his report that ". . . his mother indulged herself in a selfish fear that he would fall off his pony."[1]

Much more reasonable are the complaints that Ruskin did not have the scientific and scholarly temper of mind. Says Sir Charles Walston (natus Waldstein) of Ruskin:

> . . . a prevailing spirit of narrow dogmatism . . . in the life of this great man can be accounted for and morally justified . . . it is the result of a life too much shut up in itself, and not sobered down by the constraint of fixed discipline . . . It is a mind too much concerned with its own substance . . . its own inner lights . . .
>
> This exaggeration of the importance of one's own thoughts is often due to the neglect of reading what others have written on the very subjects of our thoughts. Now a doubt must often have come to the original student or writer whether . . . to spend much time in seeing how others have said it and to quote their views and encumber his own with footnotes and other customary forms that characterize a scholar's work. Still it will be found that the student becomes wider, and generally without loss of originality; he becomes maturer, clear, and more condensed . . . and I venture to think that if Ruskin had followed this more . . . we should not have lost much of his originality, while I certainly hold that we should have had more system, more careful deliberation, and more moderation . . ."[2]

This may be called at least a reasonable criticism of Ruskin's

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[1] Ibid., p. 36.

[2] Sir Charles Walston, The Work of John Ruskin: Its Influence upon Modern Thought and Life, pp. 148-150.

habit of thought.

Yet it may be answered: If in Ruskin's thought the reader finds something of value, more than is to be found in any but a handful of writers, why should he complain that Ruskin's is not a mind without fault? Is it, after all, a fault that he was not a scholar and did not think in the approved fashion of the scientist? Granting that this scientific procedure, or the pretense of it, is the prevailing fashion of the day, is it necessarily the only right one? Yes, it may be said, it is the only way for one who pretends to be a philosopher and to write treatises on aesthetics, the social order, and politics. Such a man must know all that has been said on the matters of which he would write; and must weigh all opinions and evidence; he must argue carefully; he must present his views in an orderly way and without irrelevancies. But the very element that makes Ruskin a figure in literature, and indeed makes him the subject for critical study, is that he does not write in the scientific manner, impersonally, with logical precision always, with encyclopedic knowledge. Rather he is a great figure in literature and not in science because his thought is colored with personal elements such as Newman describes as differentiating a work of literature from a scientific treatise. Not that these personal notes are valuable for themselves, but for what they contribute to the thought itself by way of accidental perfection. Such thought, so produced, has a value to us of its own; it may give us truth as does "science", but in a different way. We should not

complain of it.

A like insistence on the scientific method is found in another comment by Walston:

> The difficulty of forming a just estimate . . . is to be found . . . secondly, in the fact that . . . the marked distinction which generally serves to classify intellectual workers into two broad groups, namely, the practical and theoretical, does not hold good in his case . . . when he claims to be theoretic . . . there is an actual predominance of the practical or ethical aim, often interfering with and confusing its consistency . . . On the other hand the manifestly practical works often suffer from an apparent and obtrusive predominance of preconceived general maxims.[1]

Just why Ruskin must think in the framework of pure theory or pure practice is hard to see, or why he should not make use of "preconceived general maxims", unless one is so obsessed by "scholarly methods of procedure" that no other way to truth is conceivable than induction from present facts.

Wilenski has, of course, the ex planation of the lamentable lack of scholarship; it is, he says, a piece with Ruskin's manic depression:

> . . . his self-indulgence was a definite weakness . . . he never did any thing except the thing he felt like doing at the time. Of work against the grain he had no experience; he was never compelled to do it, and never put the compulsion on himself . . . He wrote the last three volumes of Modern Painters without really wanting to do so - that was as near as he ever came to disagreeable work! . . . and he was always ashamed of it . . . making fantastic transferences to persuade himself . . . he was really fulfilling some duty . . . his drawing and his intermittent studies were forms of play, and he could never pursue these activities without a sense of guilt - unless he could persuade himself

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[1] Op. cit., p. 22.

> that . . . he was in some way engaged in service to mankind.[1]

In other words, Ruskin was lazy like most men; at least that is the worst of him that can be gathered from this passage. But that a man who never did anything he did not like to do should have written three large volumes when he had lost interest in the project itself, who produced as prodigiously all his life as did Ruskin, should be condemned because his energies did not expend themselves in the approved "scholarly methods of procedure" is a proposition futile and ridiculous. But Wilenski in another place sees quite clearly, and values quite rightly, this unscholarly mind of Ruskin:

> He was always learning - or rather he was always learning by fits and starts. He learned as the imaginative genius learns, by suddenly piercing to the heart of a thing and understanding it . . . he boasted of the power . . . And he really had it.[2]

Leslie Stephen recognizes the same power:

> He was incapable of arranging his thoughts in orderly, symmetrical pigeon-holes; his mind was essentially discursive; he could see things more vividly than anyone, and argue acutely and ingeniously; but he had never the patience to consider how his thoughts should be co-ordinated into consistent unity . . . he has to make his theories . . . not by patient induction, but by flashes of intuition . . .[3]

And this power of mind, perhaps not precisely described either as power of intuition or power of analysis, but as something of both,

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[1] Op. cit., pp. 36 and 39.

[2] Ibid., p. 191.

[3] Leslie Stephen, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 90, 91.

was indeed the real genius of Ruskin. It should be recognized for what it was and for what it accomplished. As one critic says, "In fine, Ruskin analyzed both the moral and the social effects of capitalism with far greater precision than any other writer . . ."[1]

Amabel Williams-Ellis is obviously torn between an admiration for cold, hard scholarliness and for the more beautiful processes of Ruskin's mind; she writes of

> . . . His tendency to branch out and away from the main stem of his argument.
>
> It was natural to Ruskin always to trace out the more delicate and intimate consequences of his economics or aesthetics . . . Ruskin had in many respects a feminine mind . . . one of the chief characteristics of the feminine mind seems to be that it is vitally aware of the fact that life, and all the subjects of knowledge form a continuum. Interdependencies . . . the uselessness of this, without that . . . these are the facts that look large to it . . . So he mixed up arguments about the best use of wealth with his economics, and arguments about truth with his aesthetics . . .
>
> He should have known that for the purpose of analysis it was essential that he should not listen to the insidious voice of common sense . . . The longer fibres and roots with which every subject that he touched embrace and involve every other subject seemed to him less and less separable . . . When he has set himself to discuss the growth of crystals he finds himself dealing with education, or with the place of art and nature in common life, or with the right attitude to religion.[2]

Wilenski cannot with patience pass over this discursiveness of Ruskin, and is bound to say that ". . . both books [Unto this Last and Munera Pulveris] are badly arranged and badly written;

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[1] B. E. Lippincott, op. cit., p. 55.

[2] Amabel Williams-Ellis, The Tragedy of John Ruskin, pp. 215, 216.

and the arguments in both are obscured by digression and quotations from the Bible."[1] But he displays an extraordinary insight into Ruskin's mind, at least for one whose psychology has elsewhere been so tiresome, when he says of Ruskin:

> In his writings the confusing irrelevancies and discursions are as real and organic as the essentials . . . they are not . . . tied on with a string . . . always genuinely personal. He never decked himself with other people's writings . . . The digressions . . . are never padding. They have a life of their own which often conflicts with . . . the central thesis . . . curious intensity of idea at the moment which seems to go with morbid mobility of interest . . . The incidentals always bear relation to the man's attitudes even though they may bear little or no relation to the immediate context. Such passages are real and organic because they are autobiography disguised.[2]

These are some of the "characteristics" which go to make the conventional summary of Ruskin, a little garland of generalizations about the man that are well calculated to ruin the effect of his work on a fresh mind. When a reader approaches Ruskin for the first time after an editorial introduction which warns him that he will find Ruskin an undependable scholar, digressive and disorderly, inconsistent, and, cardinal sin in this day of fancied "objectivity," arrogant and dogmatic, what will he find under such tutelage but disorder, lack of scholarliness, inconsistency, and dogmatism?

Thus he will be warned by Leslie Stephen, "The arrogance of Ruskin's language was partly adopted from Carlyle, and, indeed,

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[1] Op. cit., p. 288.

[2] Ibid., p. 186.

is one of the awkward consequences of being an inspired prophet."[1]

J. M. Robertson finds this arrogance deeply rooted in Ruskin's character, and is bitter in his attack:

> . . . the very wording of the confession [that Ruskin had lost his religious faith] had come too late in his intellectual life to permit of his building up for himself a rational philosophy; he partly worded the gospel of sane life; he could not live it. The very avowal of past error is put with a threat of a terrible new predication to come, a recovered and redoubtable certitude. This spirit may taste of bitter awakening, never of a really teachable humility on great problems.
>
> His very gifts condemned him to perpetual subjectivity. It was said of him by Mazzini that he had the most analytical mind in Europe; and in a sense that is true. His mind did play analytically. But always the process is visibly limited by the self-willed temper . . . he claimed for himself a power of seeing, infinitely rarer, he complacently declared, than the power of thinking.[2]

Wilenski, the amateur psychologist, is kindlier, but kindly as one is to manic depressives and other mad people:

> It is easy to call Ruskin arrogant . . . Now I know he was not arrogant. What we mistake for the expression of his arrogance was sometimes manic exaltation, sometimes an effort to restart an engine which depression had almost paralyzed, and sometimes a defiance of some personal . . . fear. For example: "It is at least ten years since I ceased to speak of anything but what I had ascertained; and thus becoming the most practical and positive of men, left discourse of things doubtful . . . content . . . to range all matters under broad heads of things certain . . . and things uncertain."
>
> Arrogance? No. We know that he was speaking after four years experience as the Master of his Guild of St. George, which meant four years experience of being called Utopian and impractical . . . a few months after the death of a girl whose personality had long been for him an obsession, in the house of a woman friend who was a spiritualist . . . ten years since . . . he had been half converted to spiritualism. Read in this light . . . an attempt to get back to terra

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[1] Op. cit., p. 110.

[2] J.M.Robertson, Modern Humanists Reconsidered, pp. 90, 91.

firma.[1]

This is at least an excellent example of the psychiatric method, if not of the approved method of literary study. And it does make interesting biography, even though it puts quite a strain on the imagination. But as a preparation for "the further study of Ruskin" it is unfortunate.

That such force, such down-right and unqualified expression of views, should be complained of so universally, and should be unexpected in one whose fire of style is conceded without much blame, is a fact that is rather hard to understand. The two, in human nature in concreto, are almost necessarily bound together; if the one amounts to the power of genius, surely the other does not deserve such reprobation. And this is what is admitted, rather contemptuously however:

> . . . admiration once felt for Ruskin and the mildness of the critical censure . . . may be set down to the essentially emotional nature of his influence . . . impairing his thought and heightening his attraction . . . the gift of fascinating speech was for him a prophet's prestige . . . Ruskin's "values" . . . fundamentally that of the genius for utterance - a force of appeal that is independent of wisdom . . . He who stirs men in multitudes to admiration is not the thinker. . . What thrills and stirs a generation is the gift for emotional utterance . . . the element and function of his genius gave an electric force to his every utterance.[2]

Sir Edward Cook, the faithful secretary and biographer, not only knows the eloquence of his master, but is wiser in recog-

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[1] Op. cit., p. 30.

[2] J. M. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 75, 79, 80, and 84.

nizing that Robertson's contempt for such a power may be taken as only the intellectual fashion of the generation following Ruskin:

> The true secret of Ruskin's influence is this: that his books are stimulating and suggestive, because they were the expressions by a master in the art of language, of a mind which was extraordinarily rich and acute, and which had grasped some great and abiding principles . . . The criticism current at the present day is largely intellectual and scientific . . . is it quite certain that such criticism has rendered the more emotional method of Ruskin out of date for all time?[1]

On this matter of mere eloquence let the last word be Wilenski's. And the last word of his that will be quoted is commentary enough on the value of such criticism. Here indeed is bathos: "My generation, who will not drink rhetoric, demand a calm parade of arguments and statistical facts; and so they read, not Ruskin's Fors Clavigera, but Wells' Outline of History . . ."[2]

4.

Religious and Philosophical Disqualifications of Ruskin's Critics

The failure of Ruskin's critics to satisfy the Catholic teacher has also been ascribed to a cause which has been designated philosophic. By this is meant the difference, not only in philosophy but in views of the supernatural order and its very existence which separate the Catholic teacher from nearly every one of the critics of Ruskin, a difference in fundamental views of metaphysics, religion, the social order, psychology,

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[1] The Life of John Ruskin, Vol. II, p. 570.

[2] Op. cit., p. 368.

aesthetics. The Catholic will not readily overlook this difference out of love for variety in thought. Moreover, there is the difficulty a Catholic, trained in the precise language of his philosophy and theology, has with the vague terminology, and what seems to him simply the jargon of literary critics who have picked up some smattering of psychology or metaphysics or modern religion in the secular universities. When a teacher who remembers a little of his scholastic metaphysics meets a literary critic who acquired his metaphysics and psychology at Columbia University and when together they proceed to inquire into Ruskin's aesthetics, little but chaos can result. Lastly, in this connection, the Catholic teacher misses in such critics a habit of mind that goes with a training in scholastic dialectics, the habit of distinguishing. He has been taught to separate the true and the false without losing the one or accepting the other; he has learned that unqualified statements which at first sight seem contradictory can frequently be reconciled by distinguishing them - denying them insofar as they remain unqualified, accepting them with the reservations derived from the context of the author's whole work. Most critics, not trained to do this, are forever finding contradictions and inconsistencies in Ruskin where none exists.

While the two fundamental faults of Ruskin's critics naturally mingle in particular expressions of opinion, it has been possible to emphasize in the preceding pages that tendency of literary criticism to reduce all a man's work, and his ideas on a

multitude of distinct matters and at many times, to a set of personal characteristics by which it would prepare the literary neophyte to read that work. Likewise, it is possible to throw into the center of attention those manifestations of the difference in philosophical and religious position and training that make these critics very indifferent aids to a Catholic teacher.

The charge of inconsistency has been so constantly leveled at Ruskin that it is scarcely necessary to mark any particular instances of the accusation. Nor would it be of much avail to clear Ruskin by showing that some few instances of the charge were false. A devout reader of Ruskin has - unscientifically it is true - come to the conclusion that there are no inconsistencies in Ruskin; but what is such unscientific criticism against nearly all the world? But at least one instance of the charge will be brought forward, at least to show the inability, or the lack of the habit, of distinguishing in critics without training in the methods of scholastic dialectics. Says Ladd:

> In 1860 art's function is conceived rather in practical and social terms. "And in these books of mine," he writes, "their distinctive character, as essays on art, is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope." Thus . . . good morals are even desired for the sake of life, and art is understood as <u>the</u> way of healthy life. At this period the emphasis upon the revelatory power of fine art is secondary. Yet scarcely six years later, Ruskin claims, "In all my past work, my endeavour has been to show that good art is essentially religious . . ." This is an example of how the moral or humanitarian interest has been grafted upon his earlier passionate conviction of natural theology . . . It is therefore fair to say that Ruskin closed his life, as he had lived it, divided in thought with an apparent conflict still unresolved between a desire to make art a necessary social virtue, a way of life, an expression of the fullest development of the

> moral nature of man - and that other desire to conceive it as a communication to men of the spiritual truths in an idealized universe . . . The social values then upon which Ruskin based his Aesthetics were contradictory; his attitudes toward religion, nature, man, alternated from a recognition of material needs to the transient assurance of immaterial hopes . . . it flowered into profound ethical confusion.[1]

Now Ladd, presumably full of the idea that a man's personal experience must be shown up to explain his every word, seems to suppose that Ruskin's loss of his belief in Calvinistic Christianity in the late 'fifties necessarily introduced a contradiction into his views of art; that because there was a shift of emphasis in Ruskin's own mind that a reader cannot do less than find a contradiction in his doctrine. This is not so.

Ladd would make out - perhaps to the pained surprise of Ruskin himself - that Ruskin at one time defines art as essentially "communication" and at another time defines its essence as "expression"; that at one time he thought its essence was limited to producing an effect ulterior to itself, and at another he thought it was essentially limited to gratification of the artist's inner urge for "self-expression" in the fashion of the artistic temperament rebelling against Main Street and in the fashion of educators who would educate by having children "express themselves". Ladd would make out that Ruskin limited his "communicative" art to the revelation of God in the world; that the artist's "expression" was of all those social and moral experiences within the soul of the artist. And this shift to a

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[1]Henry Andrews Ladd, The Victorian Morality of Art: an Analysis of Ruskin's Esthetic, pp. 325, 326.

contradictory view is supposed to have followed Ruskin's loss of his Faith.

The answer to all this- which seems to be the conclusion of all Ladd's efforts for 336 pages - is very simple. Allowing that Ruskin would understand "expressionism" at all, let us distinguish: In Ruskin's mind, to be interpreted by his biographers apart from his writings, that there were inconsistent and contradictory views may be transmitted, though there is no very convincing proof of it. In Ruskin's works, to be interpreted by themselves, we may further distinguish: If statements and definitions, made at different times and without qualification, are to be read outside the whole context of all his work, we might concede the inconsistency; if these opinions are to be judged by the context of all his work, they can be easily reconciled as complementary rather than contradictory.

For the whole body of Ruskin's teaching, from first to last, was that all human experiences are linked, as one man with another. It is impossible to believe that at any time in his life he would have admitted the aesthetic doctrine of "expressionism" by which the artist is conceived to be such an insufferable egoist and prig as to express himself for himself alone and not as part of all mankind and all creation. Of a man's own soul in relation to God and Creation, Ruskin has much to say indeed; but that is not "expressionism."

Nor is there any contradiction between the revealing of God in man and nature, as they mirror their creator and act by His

power, in a work of art, and the dealing with moral and social "facts." The two are parts on one: God's image, His goodness, His mercy is truly revealed in the social and moral experience of man.

But against the general opinion that Ruskin is consistently inconsistent, there are two voices that should be heard. E.T.Cook has this to say:

> His method of writing and his temperament are themselves responsible for many misunderstandings. He seldom qualified his statements. He wrote at white heat. His thought was comprehensive, but at a given moment, when engaged on a particular point, he did not always see things steadily and see them whole. Yet I have shown that his doctrine of realism is not essentially inconsistent with his doctrine of impressionism.[1]

To this may be added the explanation of W. A. Knight:

> . . . his power of getting below the surface . . . Take this in connection with the growth of his character, the unfolding of his genius in many directions, and the consequent changes which occurred in his point of view. You will find the germ of his latest teaching within some of his earliest opinions . . . but all expanded, modified. So that what a surface critic deems . . . an inconsistency . . . is really a sign of its opposite . . . with the added evidence of development . . .[2]

The difference in philosophic principles is, of course, the principal reason why most critics of Ruskin are unsatisfactory to a Catholic teacher. The latter will find difficulty enough in Ruskin himself, whose metaphysical notions were formed rather haphazardly from Plato, Aristotle, post-scholastic philosophers,

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[1] Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 569.

[2] Six Lectures on Some Nineteenth Century Artists, English and French, p. 70.

together perhaps with some of his own invention; but these notions were gathered in that beautifully free and eclectic spirit which distinguished the age. Yet it is only when the young thinkers from Columbia University, such as Ladd, interpose their religious, metaphysical, and psychological notions into the interpretation of Ruskin, that the matter becomes truly serious.

Henry Andrews Ladd is perhaps the most difficult of these people, as indeed might be expected. His rather lengthy thesis for the doctorate is devoted to an analysis of Ruskin's aesthetics, and therefore has metaphysics always in the foreground. To guarantee that complete confusion will come of it all, he first acknowledges his debt to those two great sources of confusion in American education, psychology, and philosophy, Professors Dewey and Thorndike of Columbia. It then becomes grimly inevitable that he will deliver himself of this:

> Ruskin had no metaphysical bases and no reasonable logic . . . His position remained unphilosophical - even evangelical: the beautiful is useful because it is beautiful; through its contemplation revelation is possible to the pure of heart . . . in 1846 the ethical function of art is presumptuously evangelical; it is to celebrate, in a sense quite close to that of the Catholic theological esthetics of Patmore, Thompson, and Mrs. Maynell, the glory of God . . .[1]

So a metaphysical basis, a philosophical position, is impossible to one who believes the beautiful a revelation of the glory of God! And this function is called "ethical", <u>the</u> ethical, not ethical also! And it is also evangelical and Catholic at one and

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[1] <u>Op. cit.</u>, p. 324.

the same time; and to be evangelical is in the same line a further degree of being unphilosophical, as if an evangelical could not also be a philosopher. By being "presumptuously" evangelical Ladd doubtless refers to Ruskin's crowning folly of arguing a priori. And the beautiful is useful just because it is beautiful - precisely! It is a good in itself, of the greatest "usefulness" to those faculties to which it appeals.

And again Ladd objects, "The theoretical confusion that arose from this position was not of esthetics with morals, but of esthetics with mysticism."[1] And what does the Columbia metaphysician mean by "mysticism"? Does he, with his contemporaries, mean anything that is imagined to be over and outside matter? or anything that is by other men called "idealistic"? To the Catholic reader the term means neither; nor does it mean supernatural; but is limited to certain phenomena and experiences within the wider range of the supernatural. But to the Catholic Ruskin is never "mystical". Ruskin's belief that art can be a revelation of God is not mysticism.

For the further confusion of one trained in scholastic psychology Ladd offers the following: "'underlying will' for Ruskin was not a metaphysical concept; it was a moral law involving simple moral emotional states of mind."[2] Now Ruskin never agreed to take over the concept of Schopenhauer's "underlying will", whatever

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[1] Ibid., p. 331.

[2] Ibid., p. 331.

"moral sense" he posited. And no Catholic will ever understand the coupling of "moral" and "emotional", or quite understand what is a "moral state of mind".

Amabel Williams-Ellis is another who expresses, as a self-evident truth, the conviction that esthetics can have nothing to do with God or theology:

> The Seven Lamps . . . is one that the modern reader will perhaps least care to survive . . . The narrow and impertinent theology of the second volume of Modern Painters is here repeated and intensified . . . the uneasiness that we shall probably feel in reading it was . . . shared by its author . . . we are . . . in short reminded all through this treatise . . . of nothing so much as that Ruskin was taught the Christian religion by a woman who was stupid . . . and intolerant . . .[1]

Walston, writing when the "new" psychology was indeed new, and newly experimental, objects vigorously to any truth being discovered except by experimentation:

> According to him all art is revelation and all art is praise. This at once gives a religious bias to scientific investigation. I call it bias because considerations that might be introduced ultimately, when the main facts have been established, are here prematurely presented.[2]

And of course "mysticism" must be deprecated in Ruskin:

> This religious bias manifests itself furthermore in the mystical tendency apparent in his heading and subdivision. Take, for instance, his types of beauty; "Infinity, or the Type of Divine Incomprehensibility" . . . This mystical admixture vitiates the character of his Seven Lamps of Architecture . . . in the "Lamp of Sacrifice" it leads to the most absurd jugglery . . . his formalistic mysticism has often led him . . . into serio-comic niceties . . . as for instance the

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[1] Op. cit., p. 123.

[2] Op. cit., pp. 31, 32.

importance he attaches to luminous backgrounds of pictures as suggestive of expression of infinity.[1]

It is indeed difficult to get on anywhere with such critics.

[1] Ibid., p. 37

CHAPTER II

RUSKIN'S "WAY OF LIFE"

If the criticism of Ruskin is generally as unsatisfactory as has been described, one might conclude that a Catholic teacher would hesitate to offer his classes a doctrine that must be confusing in itself, or very abstruse, to have so baffled or led astray the critics. But this difficulty need not stand in the way. For the thing that makes the reading of Ruskin worth the while is precisely that which can be seen in the light of a general knowledge of Catholic truth which may be supposed in the Catholic teacher.

1.

The Unity of Ruskin's Art and Social Teaching

I say the valuable and interesting thing about Ruskin is that he has taken a whole view of life and at the same time he has given the part of Beauty in life a new importance. That there are these two elements in Ruskin's contribution must be insisted on. A Catholic teacher will not read him because he is a Christian or because he views the whole of life as a Christian. As a preacher of the Christian way of life Ruskin would scarcely be trustworthy. Nor will a Catholic read him simply as an art critic: the study of art is generally not a part of the

curriculum. But it is because of the union of the two elements in a "way of life," that Ruskin is valuable, because he offered a "way of life" in which Beauty and Art are implicated in the very notion of Christian living, not merely added to it or proposed as something not inconsistent with it. What this general view was, this "way of life", will be discussed in this chapter.

While this unity of Ruskin's view of the many things he treats may be called too obvious for notice, still it is the note of his work that calls forth an almost unanimous chorus of praise. R. W . Roe says of it:

> . . . One principle aim in his voluminous writings from Modern Painters to Fors, and it is this: that sound art, whether individual or national, is the expression of a sound life and depends for its nobleness and truth upon a noble spirit in the artist or in the age; and further, that art, so understood, is not possible when it is thought of as a mere luxury created by a few highly gifted and highly paid virtuosos for the enjoyment of an aristocratic order alone, but only when it is conceived as the creative expression of a people, working, from humblest craftsman up to master artist, in response to impulses that spring from a happy and healthy community life . . .[1]

Soundness in the life from which art proceeds is the central thought of this unity as just described. The same point is made, and much the same way, by another critic:

> It is a notable thing in Ruskin's career that beginning as a student of Art, he soon saw - as few have done - that initiation into its true principles will lead us far beyond it; that it conducts . . . to the central principles of morality. I give you a list of these as I used to put them before the students of philosophy at St. Andrews: truthfulness, sincerity, honesty,

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[1] Op. cit., p. 150.

> elevation, nobleness, reverence, reticence, admiration, magnanimity, piety, obedience . . .[1]

And again the same critic says:

> . . . he taught them that Art has a mission . . . that its function is to educate as well as to delight, and to delight by education. He thus shows us that all noble art is a portrayal less or more of the inherent truth of things . . . while the perception of Beauty elicits admiration, it should lead on to homage, and end in worship; because, as he puts it, "all great Art is praise."[2]

Sir Edward Cook quotes Ruskin's briefest summary of his doctrine:

> . . . from delight in the form and laws of God's creation Art comes; to that delight it appeals. This is the central idea of the chief book of Ruskin's gospel. "In the main aim and principle of Modern Painters," he says, "there is no variation from its first syllable to its last. It declares the perfectness and eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with or subjection to that."[3]

The testimony of George Willis Cooke on this matter suffers somewhat from the nebulousness of so many humanitarians, uplifters, and "literary" art critics:

> Both [Browning and Ruskin] alike accept the Christian faith with thorough conviction, not as a dogma and not as a tradition, but a union of man's soul with the Infinite One in the sacrament of life. To them revelation is universal and unfailing, not exceptional and arbitrary. It is the neverceasing activity of God, by which his nature consummates itself in the communion of rational beings . . . For Ruskin the aim of religious development is the perfection of men in the common fellowship of love and right doing.[4]

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[1] W. A. Knight, op. cit., p. 79.

[2] Ibid., p. 82.

[3] Studies in Ruskin, p. 6.

[4] Poets and Problems, p. 264.

This curious passage is one of those things that bring more suspicion on Ruskin than is really his due; it seems to identify Ruskin with theological "modernism", that is, if any meaning can be had from it besides the clear one that Ruskin had a single view in which all life was seen together. But more sensibly the same writer says:

> "The main aim and principle of this book," he says in Modern Painters, "is that it declares the perfectness and eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with or subjection to that." Nature, as the eternally abiding and unchanging reflection to man of God's law and will, is an element in his teaching of conspicuous importance.[1]

The danger of reading into Ruskin's unity of view some vague pantheism is clearly apparent in another passage from George Willis Cooke:

> The "natural-supernaturalism" of Carlyle, he has accepted with the utmost confidence, as he has accepted Carlyle as his greatest master in his moral teachings . . . In his thought, God, man, and nature belong to one order, unite into one interblending harmony, interfuse with and interpret each other . . . he turns away from the supernatural, because God is here in flower, cloud, and child. He cares not for angels and distorted attempts to express the spiritual because the whole world is spiritual.[2]

Ruskin has indeed written something like that; but as the passage comes to mind, it does not necessarily suppose that Ruskin rejects the supernatural from his beliefs, but rejects the attempts to represent it in pictures. Nor is it necessary to believe that Ruskin identified God, the material world, and man in

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[1] Ibid., p. 231.

[2] Ibid., pp. 205, 206.

any pantheistic sense; if it is conceivable that he followed the Modernist in a belief in the "immanence" of God, it is equally certain that the reader can be utterly unsuspicious of this and see in Ruskin only a statement of the familiar Catholic doctrine that God is everywhere in creation, maintaining it in being and concurring with its action.

2.

The Fundamentals of Ruskin's System

Perhaps it is a dangerous thing, and more likely it is an impertinent thing, to attempt for a great author what he either never dared to do, or did perfectly what he alone was capable of doing: to put within the limits of a single proposition the sum and substance of all his thought, its core, its root idea. It is attempted here for Ruskin, on the score of separating clearly what Ruskin did not, of course, put in tabular form. It is this:

1) To praise, reverence and serve God in this life

2) by contemplation, with delight, gratitude, and love, of the beauty of His creation as it reflects His own infinite Beauty - the highest human activity attaining the supreme value of life by which all others are measured -

3) and in this contemplation

to see revealed His own life and attributes for our imitation - His truth, justice, charity, holiness . . .

to see the supreme value of life is not in selfish possessions but in admiration and love,

to see that in loving Him we must love all whom He has made our fellow-men,

to see that, as all his works act together for his glory so we are not created to contend and compete for the goods necessary to maintain life, but to co-operate in

distributing them.

The first part of the proposition states that "foundation" which we find as well in Ruskin's catechism as in our own and in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises: that the end of man on earth is to praise and serve God. It is a dictate of natural reason and of natural theology; but it was from the Catechism that Ruskin received it as a believing Christian. If it does not make Ruskin's whole thought Christian and supernatural in the strict sense, at least many readers would accept it trustingly as from a true Christian.

The second part describes the proper function of Beauty and, by consequence, of Art in the life of man: the contemplation and creation of it are in the very scheme of Creation, a phase of that praise and service man owes to God. Here must be noted the relation of these two parts. They are not parallel and separate; rather the one is but a particular form of the other. Serving God and enjoying the beautiful, Religion and Art, according to Ruskin, are not unconnected departments of life; they are joined in the very nature of things.

The third part indicates what proceeds from the other two; and so it has relations with them which must be understood if we are to grasp the scheme of Ruskin's doctrine. According to the third principle, man learns from the contemplation of God's Creation, how he can return to God that service prescribed by the first principle, a service that is marked by selflessness, charity, and by co-operation in obtaining the means of life. The

third part then becomes the immediate basis for Ruskin's social teaching.

The main direction of this "way of life" may be said to have been pointed out in the second volume of Modern Painters when his criticisms of other painters and his defense and exposition of Turner in the first volume had proved the need of stating the principles of his criticism. He begins:

> . . . the investigation now before us [into these principles], which, being not of things outward, and sensibly demonstrable, but of the value and meaning of mental impressions, must be entered upon with a modesty and cautiousness proportioned to the difficulty of determining the likeness, or community of such impressions, as they are received by different men; and with seriousness proportioned to the importance of rightly regarding those faculties over which we have moral power, and therefore in relation to which we assuredly incur a moral responsibility. There is not a thing left to the choice of man to do or not to do, but there is some sort or degree of duty involved in his determination; and by how much the more, therefore, our subject becomes embarrassed by the cross influences of variously admitted passion, administered discipline, or encouraged affection, upon the minds of men, by so much the more it becomes matter of weight and import to observe by what laws we should be guided, and of what responsibilities regardful, in all that we admit, administer, or encourage.[1]

It might be objected to this passage that it assumes the fact of our responsibility for what perceptions of the beautiful we admit to our minds. Yet Ruskin is here only stating a proposition, common enough, that there are in concreto no "indifferent" acts, that everything a man does bears a relation to his last end, w hether for good or evil. At any rate Ruskin has not introduced

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, pp. 25, 26.

as yet into the formal definition of the beautiful any so-called moral element. But he does assume that as these perceptions are in some measure under the control of mind and will that they cannot be indifferent to the good or evil end of man's living. From this position he moves on to a statement that sounds presumptuous enough, and yet is a simple statement of the fact which alone interests us in Ruskin. Speaking of the seriousness of Art and the importance of it, he continues:

> But that his labour, the necessity of which, in all ages, has been most frankly admitted by the greatest men, is justifiable from a moral point of view, that it is not a vain devotion of the lives of men, that it has functions of usefulness addressed to the weightiest of human interests, and that the objects of it have calls upon us which it is inconsistent alike with our human dignity and heavenward duty to disobey, have never been boldly asserted nor fairly admitted; least of all is it likely to be so in these days of despatch and display, where vanity, on the one side, supplies the place of that love for art which is the only effective patronage, and, on the other, that of the incorruptible and earnest pride which no applause, no reprobation, can blind to its shortcomings, or beguile of its hope.[1]

Ruskin is here drawing nearer to his main proposition; he has gone one step forward in asserting that experiences of the beautiful are not only not morally indifferent acts, but of great weight in the life of man. The reason for this will be put in his main propositions, soon to follow. But the passage is quoted for this one statement, that this matter "has never been boldly asserted nor fairly admitted." It may be said, that however bumptious this may appear, there is this much truth in it: no one

[1] Ibid., p. 27.

but Ruskin in his own age and ours has insisted on this - whether true or false - as the central idea of a long life's work.

He was at this stage of his exposition not yet ready to come out with his fundamental idea. Perhaps he felt that there was only one way to approach the readers of his day with this strange notion of his, and that was the way of an appeal to their materialist, "practical," Utilitarian mentality. Under the benign star of Utility he will put forth his definition of the Beautiful:

> . . . because . . . men in the present century understand the word Useful in a strange way . . . it will be well in the outset that I define exactly what kind of Utility I mean to attribute to art, and especially to that branch of it which is concerned with those impressions of external Beauty, whose nature it is our present object to discover . . . Therefore that we may determine what is chiefly useful to man, it is necessary first to determine the use of Man himself.[1]

And now Ruskin lays down that doctrine, in the trinity of elements already ascribed to him, which was the root, the ultimate criterion, which he never recalled and with which he was never inconsistent.[2]

3.

The Perception of Beauty According to Ruskin.

Such a holy and eternal function would be attributed to the arts of painting and sculpture

> . . . but for two fatal and widespread errors respecting the great faculties of mind concerned in them. The first of these, or the Theoretic faculty, is concerned

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 28.

[2] Ibid., pp. 28-32.

> with the moral perception and appreciation of ideas of beauty. And the error respecting it, the considering and calling it Aesthetic, degrading it to a mere operation of sense . . .[1]

In respect to the second faculty, the Imagination, the error is to assume that its function is the propagation of falsity. The first error is what next, after the statement of his fundamental thesis, concerns Ruskin. That thesis could never stand if it were claimed that life's supreme value and highest activity were to be found in the gratification of the senses. So he argues:

> . . . I wholly deny that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral; and for the faculty receiving them, whose difference from mere perception I shall immediately endeavour to explain, no term can be more accurate or convenient than that employed by the Greeks, "Theoretic," which I pray permission, therefore always to use, and to call the operation of the faculty itself, Theoria.[2]

Some of the difficulties, psychological and metaphysical, offered by this definition of the nature of impressions of beauty will not be profitably considered in this chapter. They will be taken up later, but, for the present, discussion will be limited to the more general aspects of Ruskin's theory and what others think of it. Omitting some intermediate steps in the argument, we may take this passage which implies all that precedes it:

> . . . we find very sufficient ground for the higher estimation of these delights; first, in their being eternal and inexhaustible, and, secondly, in their being no means or instrument of life, but an object of life. Now, in whatever is an object of life, in whatever may

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 35.

[2] Ibid., p. 42.

> be infinitely and for itself desired, we may be sure there is something of divine; for God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake, of Himself. And so, though we were to regard the pleasures of sight merely as the highest of sensual pleasure, and though they were of rare occurrence, and when occurring, isolated and imperfect, there would still be a supernatural character about them, owing to their self-sufficiency. But when, instead of being scattered, interrupted, or chance-distributed, they are gathered together, and so arranged to enhance each other . . . there is caused by them not only a feeling of strong affection toward the object in which they exist, but a perception of purpose and adaptation of it to our desires, a perception therefore of the immediate operation of the Intelligence which so formed us, and so feeds us. . .
>
> Out of which perception arise Joy, Admiration, and Gratitude . . . Not the mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness I call Aesthesis; but the exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of it I call Theoria. For this, and this only, is the full comprehension and contemplation of the Beautiful as a gift of God . . .[1]

Ruskin continues the argument:

> It will now be understood why it was formerly said in the chapter respecting ideas of beauty, that those ideas were the subject of moral, and not of intellectual, nor altogether of sensual perception; and why I spoke of the pleasures connected with them as derived from "those material sources which are agreeable to our moral nature in its purity and perfection." For, as it is necessary to the existence of an idea of beauty, that the sensual pleasure which may be its basis should be accompanied first with joy, then with love of the object, then with the perception of kindness in a superior intelligence, finally, with thankfulness and veneration toward that intelligence itself; and as no idea can be at all considered as in any way an idea of beauty, until it be made up of these emotions, . . . and as these emotions are in no way resultant from, nor obtainable by, any operation of the Intellect; it is evident that the sensation of beauty is not sensual on the one hand, nor is it intellectual on the other, but is dependent on a pure, right and open state of the heart.[2]

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 46.

[2] Ibid., pp. 48, 49.

That beauty is, in truth, the reflection of Divine perfections in visible creation and that our delight in Beauty is to see and realize those perfections is what the world at large would simply deny, and which Ruskin has so far not demonstrated. He has argued for it a priori that God has created the world for His glory to be given by us and that our praise is in seeing and delighting in His creation, and that that perception and delight in it must be what we call the perception and delight in the Beautiful. But some deny the inference, saying that we call beautiful gives a sensual, or, more strictly, sensible, delight and hence cannot be identified with this praise of God. To that objection Ruskin has just given answer: Yes, there is in perceptions of the Beautiful a sensible pleasure, but there is something more.

Hereupon witnesses arise to testify that they have never in any sense seen God in what they are accustomed to call beautiful. They appeal from reason to experience and the testimony of their consciousness. But Ruskin appeals from the testimony of consciousness of those who have not "a pure, right, and open state of heart" to the testimony of those who have "a pure, right, and open state of heart", repeating what he had once said long before that "we may indeed perceive, as far as we are acquainted with the nature of God, that we have been so constructed as in a healthy state of mind to derive pleasure from whatever things are illustrative of that nature."[1]

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 51.

Hence it is necessary for him, before he can demonstrate from the experience of men the fact that in beautiful things we are seeing the reflection of God, that he explain what is that "pure, right, and open state of heart," and "healthy state of mind." He must chiefly, though, explain why so many are not in that state of mind and heart, and again, how they may arrive at it. He opens this stage of his argument thus:

> Hence there arise two questions . . . the first, in what way an impression of sense may be deceptive, and therefore a conclusion respecting it untrue; and the second, in what way an impression of sense, or the preference of one, may be a subject of will, and therefore of moral duty or delinquency.[1]

Ruskin has here carelessly left himself open to the criticism that Walston immediately brings forward: "To the first of these (a really fundamental one) he devotes a short paragraph, referring us to 'the common consent of mankind' (which man, or men, or race, or age?) But the second question admits of preaching, and he dwells upon it with fervent eloquence."[2] But Ruskin is not speaking here in the main of a purely psychological question, how far our senses report truly; he is referring to perceptions of beauty and how far they are worthy of our attention. And the second question of Ruskin is how the power to see worthily is to be trained under control of our will. To these questions together Ruskin devotes the whole of the chapter which they introduce. He does not dismiss the "really fundamental" one in a

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[1] Ibid., p. 52.

[2] Op. cit., pp. 36, 37.

paragraph, does not merely "dwell with fervent eloquence" on the one which "admits of preaching." At any rate this preaching of a "pure, right, and open state of heart" is worth attending:

> . . . we should have so much faith in authority as shall make us repeatedly observe and attend to that which is said to be right, even though at present we may not feel it so. And in the right mingling of this faith with the openness of heart which proves all things, lies the great difficulty . . .
>
> The temper, therefore, by which right taste is formed, is characteristically patient. It dwells upon what is submitted to it. It does not trample upon it, lest it should be pearls, even though it look like husks . . . it is hungry and thirsty too, and drinks all the dew that falls on it . . . it is distrustful of itself, so as to be ready to believe and to try all things, and yet so trustful of itself that it will neither quit what it has tried, nor take anything without trying.
>
> . . . if we can perceive beauty in everything of God's doing, we may argue that we have reached the true perception of its universal laws. Hence, false taste may be known by its fastidiousness, by its enjoyment only of particular styles and modes of things . . . it is forever meddling, . . . its eye is always upon itself, and it tests all things round it by the way they fit it. But true taste is forever growing, learning, reading, worshipping, and testing itself by the way that it fits things. And it finds whereof to feed, and hereby to grow, in all things . . .[1]

Supposing then a condition of mind and heart capable of receiving the reflections of Divinity in Creation, Ruskin proceeds to establish his thesis experimentally by an analysis of those experiences we have of the beautiful and showing that in them there are indeed glimpses of what is divine and that our delight is truly in them. It would be impossible to summarize this demonstration which in Ruskin is carried over many chapters. But that

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, pp. 58, 59, 60.

long argument from the facts of experience - though they may be too largely Ruskin's experience - at least shows he is not so given to mere assumptions, intuitions, guesses, and the final crime - a priori reasoning - for which he is sometimes criticized.

Two points in this argument should be well noted: The first is that he anticipates the obvious objection to his classification of these perceptions,

> I pretend neither to enumerate nor perceive them all . . . that the infinite ways, whether by reason or experience discoverable, by which matter in some sort may remind us of moral perfections, are hardly within any reasonable limits to be explained, if even by any single mind they might all be traced.[1]

And the second is that the apparently inexplicable division of all beauty into two kinds, of Typical Beauty, that is, reflections of the divine attributes discovered in inanimate creation, and of Vital Beauty, the appearance of the fulfillment of function in living things, is by no means essential to the rightness of his thesis. For the second kind of beauty, in spite of his insistence that it is different from the first, is also like it in this, that it too reflects the Divine power, it too, in his own words, is "an image of moral purpose and achievement" primarily in the action of God upon and in the world.

Whatever force his argument as a whole will have, there is probably no better instance of his dealing with the host of experiences of the beautiful than this analysis of

> . . . the emotion, namely, caused by all open ground,

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 76.

> or lines of any spacious kind against the sky, behind which there might be conceived the Sea. It is an emotion more pure than that caused by the sea itself, for I recollect distinctly running down behind the banks of a high beach to get their land line cutting against the sky, and receiving a more strange delight from this than from the sight of the ocean. I am not sure that this feeling is common to all children . . . I am certain that the modification of it which belongs to our after years is common to all, the love, namely, of a light distance appearing over a comparatively dark horizon. This I have tested too frequently to be mistaken by offering to indifferent spectators forms of equal abstract beauty in half tint, relieved, the one against dark sky, the other against a bright distance. The preference is invariably given the latter . . . Whatever beauty there may result from effects of light on foreground objects, - from the dew of the grass, the flash of the cascade, the glitter of the birch trunk . . . there is yet a light which the eye invariably seeks with a deeper feeling for the beautiful, - the light of the declining or breaking day, and the flakes of scarlet cloud burning like watch-fires in the green sky of the horizon; a deeper feeling, I say, not perhaps more acute . . .
>
> Let us try to discover that which effects of this kind possess or suggest . . .
>
> Do they show finer characters of form than can be developed by the broader daylight? Not so; for their power is almost independent of the forms they assume . . . the fairer forms of things are by them subdued . . . Have they more perfection of fulness of color? Not so; for their effect is oftentimes deeper when their hues are dim . . . But there is one thing that it has, or suggests, which no other object of sight suggests in equal degree, and that is - Infinity. It is of all visible things the least material, the least finite, the most typical of the nature of God . . . For the sky of night, though we may know it is boundless, is dark . . . a roof that seems to shut us in and down; but the bright distance has no limit, we feel its infinity, as we rejoice in its purity of light.[1]

Indeed, this is not the "language of the schools," yet of such argumentation one may say with Leslie Stephen,

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, pp. 79, 80, 81.

> I do not know whether the chapters in which he discusses the theoretic faculty, or imagination, will pass muster with later psychologists better than his theory of the beautiful with professors of aesthetics. But I never read anything which seemed to me to do more . . . to make clear the true characteristics of good poetry.[1]

To make clear the characteristics of good poetry! Indeed, to make clear to the willing eye whatever is beautiful to see and why we say it is so.

4.

Objections to Ruskin's Aesthetics

Detailed criticism of this main concept, that man's praise and service of God is in the delight in His reflection in Creation and in Art, is not very frequent among those who have written of Ruskin. Many are content to summarize his teachings in either a vaguely laudatory way or with a general tone of disapproval. Such are the "criticisms" quoted earlier in this chapter, where they were given not for the value of judgments which were not indeed given, but simply because they recognized the uniqueness - and the unity - of Ruskin's teaching. Hence there are only three from whom will be drawn any definite objections to the theory. They are Sir Charles Walston, R. H. Wilenski, and H. A. Ladd. Difficulties that a Catholic teacher might have with their criticism have already been described at length, and will perhaps explain a certain impatience now with their objection.

The most reasonable one of them is that which Walston

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[1] Op. cit., p. 93.

raises:

> I maintain that for the discovery of the principles of all art, those arts which reproduce known forms of nature, such as sculpture and painting, are not so likely to yield satisfactory results as the more purely decorative arts and the early forms of music.[1]

Surely the theory breaks down that art is essentially representative of the divine perfections, when it is applied to music. But so do all theories break on the same rock; all, of course preserve some appearances of their original consistency, and Ruskin's is equally successful or unsuccessful. It might be answered in Ruskin's place that music first stirs the emotions without rousing any particular ideas, as the bare notion of "program" music would imply; then the emotion stirs the mind to appropriate reflections - any reflections that fit the mood created by the music, and why not of heavenly things? Or, it might be answered that the perception among sensibly pleasing sounds of a "form", intricate in its counterpoint, its development of thematic material, colorful, as they say, in its orchestration, gives a pleasure akin to that we find in the unity-in-variety of all creation. Well, a not very satisfactory answer . . .

Walston is not satisfactory either when he challenges one of Ruskin's principal statements in this wise:

> It surely brings us no further to say that "we may indeed perceive, as far as we are acquainted with the nature of God, that we have been so constructed as in a healthy state of mind to derive pleasure from whatever things are illustrative of that nature." If he could undertake soberly and adequately to define the

[1] Op. cit., p. 42.

> nature of God, we might then test the healthy state of man's mind by it. But this he does not do.[1]

Inexplicably Walston misses the meaning of Ruskin. Ruskin does not argue that we know the healthy state of man's mind and its nature from our knowledge of the nature of God and His "mind." The force of his words is that we know from the nature of God that he creates for a purpose, His extrinsic glory, that man is made to praise Him and is given the faculties and the visible means by which those faculties can exercise themselves to praise and glorify Him, that the contemplation of His excellence is the visible and even invisible creation, the delight in it, the acknowledgment of it are all to be identified in the perception of the Beautiful. The pious complaint, "If he could undertake soberly and adequately to define the nature of God," is the gentle irony we might look for from Walston. Ruskin never spoke as one having a knowledge of God beyond what any Christian who had read his Catechism might have.

Again Walston objects:

> Now even granting his teleological premise that all nature is pervaded with divine spirit . . . the different artists, in search of this divine spirit, will see it in different parts and lights and aspects, according to their personal, moral, intellectual, or artistic character . . . and even the same artist will see different spirit in the same scene in his varying moods . . . But surely the spirit at work lay in this personal element which they added or infused, the unity of soul which welded together into a necessary whole the infinite multiplicity of phenomena before them . . . What makes it art is this human organization of the facts of nature.[2]

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[1] Op. cit., p. 36.

[2] Ibid., pp. 40, 41.

Briefly, we must distinguish: this personal view and organization constitute the formal element of Art, Yes! That they are the material element, No! This is no concession, or receding from Ruskin's view. All the facts that Walston alludes to are described at great length in the fifteenth chapter of Modern Painters, the second volume. The inference which Walston makes is simply unwarranted. In the work of art the infinity of aspects seen by various artists and in their varying moods, are not precisely "creations" of their own minds as he suggests; they are simply, one would say with Ruskin, the infinitely numerous and different, because all are imperfect and incomplete, glimpses of that Infinite Being Who can never be perfectly known, no matter how great the minds and how numerous and how different are the little pieces of their knowledge of Him.

Ladd apparently cannot believe that Ruskin approached the problem logically; he seems to believe that Ruskin got himself into an awkward position and then wrenched the facts out of their own ground to protect himself. The following pass age pretends to trace the process:

> He believed that art was a noble language, and above all that landscape was perhaps its most thrilling and certainly its newest type. He began by justifying the esthetic representation of "natural truth." Only by genuine esthetic seeing could the artist "reveal" the facts of God's universe. But the true facts of an art must necessarily be shown compatible with beauty; so he proceeded to analyze the objects on grounds of beautiful impressions. His explanation, however, had to impress the reader with as great authority as those of critics before him. It seemed to him, therefore, that each kind of truth or beauty in art had to be given some unusual connection with human behavior, some ultimate value, if possible, to human life . . . this drove him

straight to morals.

> The revived tenets of "Natural Religion" illuminated the emotional value of landscape; but emotion, sentiments, fancies demanded some discriminative principle. With religion gone from the current subject matter, what could serve as a criterion to his own conscience and to that of other educated men but some such absolute as the moral sense? It could apprehend the beauty of emotional meaning of landscape . . . It was a triumphant sanction, Ruskin's reasoning was not obscure: if the language of art must convey something, that something must be of value to life besides being in itself esthetically good; beauty could not be abstract and esoteric: it was obviously something emotional . . . Art, by the very nature of its content, its potent form, its human expressiveness, must involve a theory of moral value . . .[1]

This sort of criticism offers no rational objection to Ruskin's argument for his main thesis; it simply suggests his insincerity in offering it. There is also implied in it a complete separa tion between Beauty and what both Ruskin and Ladd agree to call "morals." That this is a weakness in the metaphysics of Ladd and of Ruskin too is a matter to be discussed in the next chapter. But because this and other criticisms are aimed at the fundamental notions of Ruskin's view of life, it is well to bring them together here:

> Believing and explicitly stating that beauty consists of mental impressions, that it is without objective reality in any metaphysical sense, Ruskin objectifies it as all esthetic writers tend to do. He analyzes beauty into types . . . in order to discover secrets of the instinctive and spiritual pleasure which beauty affords. Granting the illusion of its essential objectivity this seemed the only sensible way to discuss beauty.[2]

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[1] Op. cit., p. 168.

[2] Ladd, op. cit., p. 170.

Now many statements of Ruskin are easily contrued into inconsistency with his main principles, and such an explicit one can only be understood in the light of the whole body of Ruskin's exposition. To say that beauty consists in mental impressions is equivalent to saying that it has no basis in reality is not quite true. Something outside the mind is necessary to the making of an impression on it, and this is the fundamentum in re. And everywhere Ruskin speaks as if he supposed that all concepts of Beauty are derived from the world outside the mind; indeed his whole theory is built precisely on that metaphysical assumption that the perceptions of the divine perfections are derived from the visible and very objective world. Such criticism as this of Ladd's is simply blindness to everything but the sentence before him.

What appears to be Wilenski's chief objection to Ruskin's art theories is that a century ago he did not foresee the art "moderne" and embrace it. Elsewhere will be recorded his complaints that Ruskin had no prophetic vision of Corbusier and his house flowering on stalks of central plumbing, heating, and lighting shafts. Now his complaint is less fantastic:

> Ruskin had Baudelaire's concept of the Universal Analogy. The concept in itself was the product of his genius - though his assumption that he could demonstrate that Analogy in the whole system of nature . . . was born of the manic aspect of his illness. That concept as I have tried to show in The Meaning of Modern Sculpture stands at the center of the modern artist's creed. But the modern artists do not draw Ruskin's distinction between geometric and organic art. They regard the distinction as a fallacy inherent in The Romantic Movement, which postulated a wild, free, rugged

> "Nature" with no formality in its structure and opposed in its essential character to unity, harmony, and order. Science has shown more and more the amazing formality of natural form . . . and the modern artist looks upon geometric form as symbolic of the formality in organic life.[1]

The impertinence of Wilenski's attributing the concept of the universal analogy to Baudelaire as his private property and invention is not the least irritating of all Wilenski's impertinences; the universal analogy is probably as old as the mind of man; at least Wilenski need not be ignorant that Christian thought has always known the world as created in God's image and reflecting in some way and degree the infinite content of the Divine Being and so bearing similarity, one being to another, throughout creation. That the effort to demonstrate that analogy in the "whole system of nature" could only be "born of the manic aspect of his illness" is a quite impossible inference; Ruskin does attempt to see all that may be seen of the divine beauty in "the whole system of nature"; he explicitly, at the beginning of his chapter on Typical Beauty, denies that he can exhaust that infinite wealth.

That Ruskin rejected the geometric in art, that he even went so far as to find the straight forms of wall and roof, and their proportions of mass, not of the essence of art, is somewhat pardonable, seeing, first, that the Creator has not used geometric forms in the visible massing of His creation, however much of geometry there is in its structure below the eye's perception;

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[1] Op. cit., p. 240.

secondly, that geometric painting and sculpture has not been taken very seriously by any but a suspiciously super-sophisticated group of moderns. There may be "something in it" which Ruskin missed, but not many will complain that he did.

Wilenski makes much of another discovery of inconsistency:

> He saw that value . . . derives from the metaphysical goodness of the artist and that it cannot be assessed by its effects on the spectator. But he did not press this to its logical conclusion and say that no one but the artist who revealed it could receive the full revelation . . . He did not advance to the concept . . . of value altogether present to the work after its completion by the good or bad, wise or stupid, gross or sensitive spectator . . . he was held back here, I fancy, by manic confidence . . . that he himself could assess all types of Value in works of art. He was always ready to say that a picture was or was not "worth so much money" . . . did not realize . . . he was . . . confusing Intrinsic Value and Exchange.[1]
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> . . . his Intrinsic Value in Art was the Value of the Artist, Deity taught by Deity, but in Economics it is the Avail toward Life . . . To have been consistent, Economic Intrinsic Value should have been in terms of Cost to the human being who made it . . .[2]

Wilenski argues further in this passage that as Ruskin so often appraised a picture's intrinsic value in terms of money, so he should have praised the intrinsic value of economic goods, but that Ruskin dared not attempt so impossible a task. But the supposed inconsistency between the intrinsic value ascribed to works of art and that ascribed to the products of the factory can be cleared up, as most such "inconsistencies" can, by referring both valuations to the context of Ruskin's thought. The intrinsic

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[1] Op. cit., p. 241.

[2] Ibid., pp. 300, 301.

value of art is the "artist, Deity taught by Deity," says Wilenski. Obviously to any one who has read Ruskin's theological opinions, this does not mean the Artist is to be identified in any pantheistic sense with God, nor that his work has value as the words of a President of the United States are valued, simply because his position deserves our respect. No, the artist's work has value in virtue of his being made in the image of God and being taught by God only in so far as his powers of intelligence, faintly reflective of God's, produce works that must have the imprint of that intelligence and imagination on them objectively. Since those powers are in themselves noble and worthy so must their imprint be, just as God's own work must be good simply because He cannot be conceived as doing a poor thing. Now what the artist, with God-like powers, puts into his work cannot avail toward life. Thus read there is no inconsistency in Ruskin's notions of Intrinsic Value in Art and in Economics.

The criticisms of Ruskin that have just been discussed regard particular points of doctrine, though generally reflecting adversely on the view as a whole. When we pass from these and look for opinions on that whole view of Ruskin, what I have called his "way of life," we find, first of all that series of generalizations which do little more than recognize he had a general view of life of which Beauty and Art were portions. These critics seem afraid to offer a definite opinion on this view.

But there are some remarks of Ladd on this matter that should be noted simply because they attribute to Ruskin a view

which he did not hold. In summarizing the work of Ruskin Ladd says: "It [Ruskin's theory] was, moreover the first modern emotionalist theory in England to imply as its central position the 'expressionistic' end of emotional language."[1] And again,

> Finally, Ruskin's is the first theory that I know to suggest that in the activity of art itself there lay the ultimate social value . . . that art was itself a good life.[2]

Lastly and at greater length:

> The critic of an art isolated from the so-called mundane interests of life cannot admit moral considerations in any of the objects he beholds. He can discuss art only in terms of form, color and technique or emotional abstractions which attempt to deny their moral roots . . . It may be then that Ruskin's emphasis upon moral values in art holds a specific importance for the twentieth century. In an industrial civilization where the machine has lifted the pleasurable burden of making things, art may remain the only adequate medium for the realization of personality. To such a world Ruskin's theory has precise relevance; not only does it relate art objects to the moral values of daily life, but it centralizes an ethical principle in revealing art as the best possible kind of work. For the heart of Ruskinism lies in understanding art to be, not the escape from, but the way to life.[3]

Many are likely, with Ladd, to form the opinion that Ruskin would make art <u>the</u> way of life. Ladd moreover would seem to make the chief value of this life the "realization of personality," its "expressionistic end," as he says of emotional language. This interpretation is a mistaken one indeed. To Ruskin Art and the contemplation of natural beauty are a form of service and

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[1] <u>Op. cit.</u>, p. 339.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>

[3] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 339, 341.

praise of God; his whole teaching is to that effect. But he does not argue that it is the only way to praise God; we are still to worship and praise Him according to the ways prescribed by the Church. Moreover there is all that Ruskin teaches of this service that we include in his economic and social doctrine. It is true that Ruskin derives this from that knowledge revealed through Beauty, but the social order that may be revealed by God through His creation and through Art is not the same as Art. Art, then, is not the whole of life. That the end of Art in Ruskin's mind is not "expressionism", the "realization of personality," no mere egotistical self-exploitation, has already been very emphatically denied.

5.

Ruskin's fundamentals in the Light of Catholic Thought.

If Ruskin neither makes Art and the cultivation of Beauty a matter of "self-realization" nor a complete and sufficient "way of life," but instead of realization of the Divine Being and a part, but only a part, of our service of the Divine Being, will not his doctrine be found entirely conformable to the views of Catholic theology and philosophy? The answer to that question is not an easy one to make.

Now the theory of Beauty and its place in our lives to which we may say Catholic philosophers in general subscribe, basically that of St. Thomas, is not the opinion of Ruskin. Because they differ, rather than contradict each other, the two, perhaps, can be reconciled. Let the most fundamental phase of the question be

taken first and the two opinions compared. St. Thomas and most of the scholastics define the essence of Beauty as a splendor or resplendentia, or claritas, or perfectio of a being's forma, that is, of its nature, its very being.[1] Ruskin makes nothing of such a suggestion of ideality, but places the essential of beauty in the creature's imaging of its Creator. So far Ruskin and the scholastics differ quite plainly. But they not only differ, but they also agree; each makes concessions to the other.

No scholastic philosopher, no Catholic theologian, but would admit that every being necessarily is created in the image of the Creator: the Creator and Infinite Being contains eminenter every perfection that is found in the creature. This much of Ruskin they would all admit. That this image constitutes beauty there are some scholastics to agree, but most would not. With St. Thomas they would say that to the forma in which is the image of the Creator there must be added a note by which it can be constituted "formally" beautiful. For, they say, not all things are beautiful; men simply do not apply the term to everything. This formal element of Beauty is the splendor or claritas or perfectio in which the being's "form" shows itself; in other words, it is a matter of degree - of the degree of clarity in which the image of the Creator shows itself. Hence they admit that every being, by virtue of its creation and its reflecting in some way the

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[1]Cf. John Rickaby, S.J., General Metaphysics, pp. 150, 151, or P. Coffey, Ontology, p. 202, for the scholastic opinion as generally taught.

Creator's being, is fundamentally, or radically, though not formally, Beautiful. Now Ruskin, from the tenor of all his work, seems to insist on finding Beauty in everything and to do so without any qualification only to save his principle that God has given us Beauty to help us adore and know Him. Yet he does on every page admit that there are degrees in Beauty, he speaks of what is ugly, of what emphatically is <u>not</u> beautiful. Taking him with all he has to say, one might be justified in saying that he is really in agreement with the scholastic view.

That the scholastic philosophers and theologians do not with Ruskin take Beauty into the service and praise of God as its necessary function is another difference on which reconciliation is in some degree possible. With what must seem to theologians much surer, more necessary ways of worshipping God, and, in comparison with the worship offered Him in the Mass and the prayers of Christians, with so uncertain, so humanly fallible a means of worship as Beauty,- with these in front of them for comparison, it is easy to see that the way of Beauty would be ignored, or rejected, or at least slighted. Theologians and Catholics generally would not perhaps contradict Ruskin's view, but rather find it unnecessary to the Christian life.

For, indeed, there is so much in Catholic theology that agrees with Ruskin on this matter, or perhaps more accurately, lays a foundation for agreement. Supernaturally we are to contemplate God face to face, delight in His countenance, praise and adore Him, in the beatitude of the heavenly life; that contem-

plation is to be the essential happiness of Heaven. Similarly, the natural destiny of man is to happiness in knowledge of God, in a contemplation of Him, not face to face, but by knowledge of Him as He shows Himself in His creatures.

In these last pages no Catholic philosophers have been cited for their individual authority or for their original views, and with a reason. The Catholic teacher, ordinarily, is wisely dependent on the common opinion of theologians or philosophers in any matter that touches God and His divinely revealed religion as does such a theory as Ruskin's. Such matters are not for speculation in the class room. Hence it is that no effort has been made here to discover every variety of speculation on the nature of Beauty by Catholic philosophers. Fathers Rickaby and Coffey have been referred to for their dependability in giving sound Catholic views, the latter as a professor at Maynooth, the former as one of those chosen to do the "Stonyhurst Philosophical Series."

CHAPTER III

THE TRUE AND THE GOOD

It has seemed well to postpone the discussion of certain elements of Ruskin's theory that are really presupposed to what we have been calling his fundamental concepts. While it seemed best to discuss first Ruskin's special contribution and the reason for our interest in him, yet there are presupposed to this metaphysical, or ontological, considerations.

1.

Metaphysical Presuppositions of Ruskin's Aesthetics.

These suppositions of Ruskin's are the relations of Beauty to the True and the Good. A glance at any treatise on ontology by a scholastic philosopher will reveal how intimately connected these relations are. For it is appended to the discussion of the transcendental attributes of Being - that every being is One, True, and Good - that the reader will find the exposition of the Beautiful. Is beauty, the philosopher asks, another transcendental attribute of Being? If not, what relation does it bear to Truth and to Goodness?

Says St. Thomas:

> . . . ergo dicendum quod pulchrum et bonum in subjecto quidem sunt idem, quia super eamdem rem fundantur, scilicet super formam; et propter hoc bonum laudatur ut pulchrum; sed ratione differunt; nam bonum proprie

> respicit appetitum; est enim bonum, quod omnia appetunt; et ideo habet rationem finis; nam appetitus est quasi quidam motus ad rem. Pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam; pulchra enim dicuntur, quae visa placent; unde pulchrum in debita proportione consistit; quia sensu delectantur in rebus debite proportionatis, sicut in sibi similibus; nam et sensu ratio quaedam est; et omnis virtus cognoscitiva. Et quia cognitio fit per assimilationem, similitudo autem respicit formam; pulchrum proprie pertinet ad rationem causae formalis.[1]

And again:

> . . . pulchrum est idem bono sola ratione differens. Cum enim bonum sit quod omnia appetunt, de ratione boni est quod in eo quietetur appetitus. Sed ad rationem pulchri pertinet quod in ejus aspectu seu cognitione quietetur appetitus; unde et illi sensu praecipue respiciunt pulchrum qui maxime cognoscitivi sunt, scilicet visus et auditus rationi deservientes; dicimus enim pulchra visibilia et pulchros sonos. Insensibilibus autem aliorum sensuum non utimur nomine pulchritudinis; non enim dicimus pulchros sapores aut odores. Et sic patetquod pulchrum addit supra bonum quemdam ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam; ita quod bonum dicatur id quod simpliciter complacet appetitui; pulchrum autem dicatur id cujus ipsa apprehensio placet.[2]

The first significance of these passages is the repeated statement that the Good and the Beautiful differ only logically; that the same thing, the same perfection, on account of which an object is called "good," is the basis for calling it "beautiful." The difference is in the aspect of it: viewed as moving the appetite, the will, to possess it, it is called "good"; considered as appealing to the cognitive faculties which are satisfied in the pleasure of beholding it, it is called "beautiful."

In these passages there are a number of points made relative to the complete theory of the beautiful; such as, for instance,

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[1] Summa Theologica, Para Prima, Q.V., a. 4, ad 1^{um}.

[2] Op. cit., Prima Secundae, Q. XXVII, a. 1, ad 3^{um}.

that beauty consists in a "due proportion" of the elements of a thing; that we do not call those things beautiful which come through the less cognitive senses, such as taste and smell; that, more important just now, though only implicitly, that the Beautiful is related to the True as it is to the Good. But the statement that it differs only "ratione" from the Good is by all means to be stressed. For that complete divorce of the Beautiful, so as to deny its relations with the Good and the True, is the initial heresy of most modern errors in art. And it is the reason for most of the excellence in Ruskin's theory that he did not sanction the separation. As William Knight says of him:

> "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." To a dictum so one-sided, he would have replied by a direct negative; and both in writing and in conversation, from first to last, he unfolded the distinction between the two provinces, clearly and unmistakably. But he knew their correspondences.[1]

Although so many simply identify them as does Keats, yet for a long time it has been the more frequent error to go to the other extreme. Ruskin, to judge him by his whole work, and like St. Thomas, made a logical distinction between them - and saved himself.

That the teaching of St. Thomas on this matter, as on most, is the common opinion among scholastic philosophers, and that it may, perhaps, be clearer for the repetition, the explanation of Father Coffey is given:

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[1] Op. cit., p. 69.

> Truth and Goodness characterize reality as related to intellect and will. Intimately connected with these notions is that of the beautiful . . .
>
> But the *good* pleases us and affects us agreeably. Is the beautiful then identical with the good? No; the really beautiful is indeed always good; but not everything that is good is beautiful . . . The owner of an art treasure may derive pleasure from his sense of proprietorship; but this is distinct from esthetic pleasure that may be derived by others, no less than by himself, from the mere contemplation of those objects. Esthetic pleasure is disinterested; it springs from the mere *contemplation* of an object as beautiful; whereas the pleasure that springs from the object as good is an interested pleasure, a pleasure of *possession*. No doubt the beautiful is really identical with the good, though logically distinct from the latter . . .
>
> But if esthetic pleasure is derived from contemplation, is not this identifying the beautiful with the true, and supplanting art by science? Again the consequence is inadmissible; for not every pleasure peculiar to knowledge is esthetic; there is a pleasure in seeking and discovering truth, the pleasure which gratifies the scholar . . . The really beautiful is indeed always true, but it cannot well be maintained that all truths are beautiful . . .
>
> . . . the scientist's pleasure proper lies exclusively in discovering truth, whereas that of the artist lies in contemplating something imagined, conceived . . .[1]

And again:

> That the works of God in general are beautiful cannot be denied . . . But while creatures, by revealing their own beauty, reflect the Uncreated beauty of God in the precise degree which He has willed from all eternity, it cannot be said that they all realize the beauty of their Divine Exemplars according to His primary purpose and decree. Since there is physical and moral evil in the universe, since there are beings which fail to realize their ends, to attain to the perfection of their nature, it follows that these beings are not beautiful. In so far forth as they have real being, and the goodness of perfection which is identical with their reality, it may be admitted that all real beings are *fundamentally* beautiful; for goodness or perfection is the foundation of beauty . . . in

[1] *Ontology*, pp. 192-196.

> order that a thing which has the full perfection due to its nature be formally beautiful, it must actually show forth by the clearness of its proportions and the harmony of its activities the fulness of its natural perfections . . . this is not universally verified . . . hence we must infer that formal beauty is not a transcendental attribute of reality.[1]

To summarize: Beauty is identified with the Good and the True in so far as it is a matter for cognition and for the faculties of appetition; it is, however, different from them logically in that it is not a matter of the discovery of truth, nor of possession of the good, but gives satisfaction in contemplation. Fundamentally, or radically, every thing, just as it is true and good, is beautiful; but it is formally beautiful only when its perfections have a certain distinction, clarity, or splendor. And Beauty therefore is something objective, not a state or mere activity of the mind, but identified with Truth and Good in the reality outside the mind.

With all the points that Father Coffey makes, Ruskin is in substantial agreement. In spite of his explicit assertion that the perception of Beauty is not intellectual but moral, the whole tenor of his writings shows that he never believed it anything else than intellectual. Particular statements of Ruskin and the terms he uses make him appear inconsistent with himself and with the scholastic doctrine reviewed above; yet again a consideration of his whole exposition will likely prove him in agreement with scholastic metaphysics.

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[1] Op. cit., pp. 202, 203.

The difficulties arise as soon as he defines the nature of our perceptions of the Beautiful. He says at the beginning of the second chapter of the second volume of Modern Painters,[1] "I wholly deny that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral." Ladd repeatedly reports his teaching as if he read him to assert that Beauty was essentially something emotional. Now if impressions of beauty are neither sensual (a term confusing in itself, for which the scholastic would substitute "sensible" without changing Ruskin's meaning) nor intellectual, how can they involve Truth? how can they be representative of the Divine Being? assimilations of it? And again, what does "moral" mean here? Does it refer to an act of the will as the scholastic would suppose? Or is it merely emotional, as Ladd seems to have gathered in his reading of Ruskin? And finally, what is a "moral" impression? Is this "moral" impression, which seems to be an emotional experience, enough to lead a man to the Good?

Yet along with these very confusing terms we find Ruskin speaking of the "contemplation" and the "perception" of Beauty, and since what is received is the reflection of God's perfections in creatures, we come to the conclusion that Ruskin really did believe that the impressions were first of all sensible and then intellectual, and therefore involved the True; and that by describing the impressions as "moral" he could only have been re-

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, p. 142.

garding the will as in some fashion embracing the Good after it has been proposed by the intellect and as accompanied in its action by emotions. Consistently with this interpretation is the general tenor, the implications of all his important principles, but he is often enough confusing, either by the carelessness, or the very fervor and rapidity of his development, or out of the vagueness of his metaphysical background.

2.

Truth in Art

By recognizing, at least implicitly, the relation of the Beautiful to the True Ruskin saved himself, it has been said. From what was he saved? From errors that have wrought so much harm in the arts, especially since his time, but which were at work even before him. These have been of two kinds - two basic errors we may say.

The one was a revolt from the belief that the Truth is important; scepticism, idealism, materialism, everything that had made truth seem an idle dream to men, prepared the way for this revolt. It was an easy development to assert the complete divorce of Art from Truth, and from the Good as well. Subjectivism became the rule in Art. The exploitation of personal feelings, thoughts, not for the sake of their <u>true</u> illustration of human nature, but as mere "self-realization" or "self-expression"; the irresponsible playing with ideas, for the mere sake of the "play of intellect"; and the encouraging of novelists, dramatists, and poets to put forward their wayward, willful "philosophies" in

story or play - these were but the more notable fruits of this separation of Art from Truth.

It is true that while Truth was being denied and the possibility of certain knowledge, there was growing a tremendous interest in Fact as reported by the senses. But the Realism, which was its literary phase, was only another way of rejecting Truth; it might be called the school of Fact without Meaning, in its theory a mere negation that there was in the world any truth beyond the report of our senses. It really was only another phase of Subjectivism.

What is the opposite of this? For what was Ruskin saved? Read these sentences of Ruskin:

> When the entire purpose of art was moral teaching, it naturally took truth for its first object, and beauty, and the pleasure resulting from beauty for its second.
>
> That is to say, in all they did, the old artists endeavored in one way or another to express the real facts of the subject or event, this being their chief business . . .[1]

And again:

> . . . the simple fact is, that there is a man's lifetime taken up in writing and ornamenting a Bible, as the sole end of his art; and that doing this either in a book, or on a wall, was the common artist's life at the time; the constant Bible reading and Bible thinking which this work involved made a man serious and thoughtful, and a good workman, because he was always expressing those feelings which, whether right or wrong, were the groundwork of his whole being.[2]

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[1] Pre-Raphaelitism, p. 321, Estes edition.

[2] Ibid., p. 320.

While Ruskin in the first of these passages speaks of Beauty as separate from Truth and Reality - and the statement must be read in the light of his fundamental beliefs as an exaggeration for present effect -, it remains that he saw in the medieval artist one whose eye was on the Truth as something outside him and not a "personal view," who believed it simply his job to report this Truth as something beautiful, something in the service of God. Ruskin saw that to the medieval artist the Incarnation was a thing supremely true, supremely good, and supremely worth contemplating and delighting in. Perhaps Ruskin did not foresee the subjectivity of the artist who would paint the grass blue "because it seemed blue to him," but the error that leads to pink elephants was apparent to him. Thus, to Ruskin, the Artist had a simple function in life - to make visible, to repeat to men the Truth that was their common property, but whose realization could always be made stronger and more vital.

But there are in Ruskin's own expositions of his theory indications that he separated Truth from Beauty as several elements of equal independence and value in a work of art. There is the sentence just quoted; there are the seven "lamps," among which Beauty shines as only one and independently of Truth and all the rest; in the very first volume of Modern Painters where the several "ideas" to be had from painting are explained, and where Beauty is again numbered only one among others. And that he intended such a separation was the conclusion of Ladd, who writes:

> It will be recalled that up to Ruskin's time art had been primarily concerned with beauty. Even the

> psychological theories were an attempt to explain the beautiful. Ruskin however in his attempt to humanize beauty itself by reading into nature and art the indication of moral states, broadened the theoretical scope of natural beauty; moreover, he brought into art two other classes of feelings, ideas of Truth and of Relation; these became increasingly important . . . Beauty became merely one of Art's concerns, and not the most important one.[1]

And again:

> Ruskin's theory . . . is also the first to emphasize true impressions rather than formal beauty as a primary concern and thus to break the traditional bonds of beauty worship . . .[2]

Taking note of the first volume of Modern Painters, he says:

> Ruskin's avoiding of Locke's metaphysics . . . yet taking over . . . five categories of Truth, Beauty, Power, Imitation, Relation from Locke, got into difficulties he never cleared up . . . "Ideas of Truth" remained for Ruskin very much what Locke meant by simple ideas. As applied to art, "Ideas of Truth" are the foundation material derived from sense perception. In just this, "Ideas of Beauty" correspond without exact metaphysical precision to Locke's "complex ideas" of modes or substances. "Ideas of Relation" are the simple or complex ideas brought together either in "considering or comparing." "Ideas of Imitation" are nothing more to Ruskin than a persuasion that an image is true when it isn't . . .[3]

Ladd's understanding of these "ideas" seems at least inadequate when he supposes Truth, Beauty, Relation to be so many equal and independent elements. But Ruskin is not very careful to clear up the misunderstanding that comes of such divisions as he makes. Yet there is revealed in Ruskin's exposition of these "ideas" and similar groupings of Truth, Beauty, Power, and so

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[1] Op. cit., p. 336.

[2] Ibid., p. 339.

[3] Ibid., p. 37.

forth, relations and dependencies that indicate in his mind a higher unity around the concept of Beauty.

The ideas of Beauty and Relation refer to one and the same thing, perceived differently; those of Beauty are received, we would say, subconsciously, or as Ruskin says, instinctively and without reflection of the intellect, so that he calls this kind of perception "moral";[1] those of Relation are the perceptions received by the reflective activity of the one contemplating. Ladd correctly describes these latter as "thoughts" and as "ideas brought together in considering or comparing," though these descriptions do not distinguish clearly the difference from ideas of Beauty which he describes, taking Ruskin too literally, as "moral emotions," and as "complex ideas of modes or substances," whatever that may mean. Incidentally it may here be seen what confusion Ruskin introduces by calling all these "ideas": for we then get, "ideas of thoughts" and "ideas of complex ideas of modes."

Again, the ideas of Truth and Imitation should be understood together as the right and the wrong of one and the same matter. They are not two equal and independent elements in Art, while Beauty is a third. Ladd calls the former "foundation material derived from sense perception" and "facts"; Ruskin calls them perceptions of "the faithfulness of such a statement," i.e. of the facts of nature. As Ruskin understands it the relation of such Truth to Beauty is that of the foundation, or we may say the

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[1] Works, Vol. III, pp. 109, 110.

condition under which Beauty is. And it is just this relation we must insist on: so that Beauty is not simply a less important element in Ruskin's art theory and Truth the greater, but Truth is the foundation or condition of the artist's good work.[1] And it's well to recall here the scholastic view that Truth and Beauty are one and the same thing, only ratione distinct. But Ladd does not indicate any such connection between the ideas of Truth and Beauty. Nor does he see the relation between the ideas of Truth and Imitation, describing the latter as "false impressions" and the "persuasion that an image is true when it isn't," descriptions which entirely miss the point of Ruskin who opposes Imitation to Truth as the wrong condition or foundation of Beauty.

"Whenever anything looks like what it is not . . . whenever the work is seen to resemble something which we know it is not, we receive an idea of imitation."[2] He compares the two, Truth and Imitation, not in their definition, but in the effect produced:

> . . . the mind in receiving one of the former of Truth dwells upon its own conception of the fact, or form, of feeling stated, and is occupied only with the qualities and character of that fact or form . . . all the while totally regardless of the signs or symbols by which the notions of it has been conveyed. These signs have no pretence . . . they bear their message simply and clearly, and it is that message which the mind takes from them, dwells upon, regardless of the language in which it is delivered. But the mind, in receiving an idea of imitation, is wholly occupied in finding out that what has been suggested to it is not what it appears to be . . . it derives its pleasure, not from the contemplation of a truth, but from the discovery of a falsehood.[3]

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[1] Works, Vol. III, pp. 136, 137.
[2] Ibid., p. 100.
[3] Ibid., p. 108.

Four of these "ideas" have now been seen reduced to this formula: Truth is related to Beauty as its necessary condition. There remains the "idea of Power," the perception of the power and skill and labor of the artist in his work. That it can be reduced to a part or phase of Beauty itself may be doubted, unless we take these words of Ruskin as doing so: "that beauty and difficulty go together"[1] and "wherever power of any kind or degree has been exerted, the marks . . . are stamped upon its results.[2]

Again we may explain Ruskin's enumerating Beauty as a separate element in art along with Truth and others, by recalling how terms are often used and carefully defined by scholastic writers-how frequently a term is defined, first in "sensu strictissimo," then in "sensu stricto," and finally in "sensu lato." So seems Ruskin to use the term Beauty and understand by it, first of all, the whole matter of Art, and again, a very limited kind of perceptions, the subconsciously grasped image of God in creation. In this latter sense, it is only one of several elements in the whole work of Art.

In conclusion then, it may be said that, according to Ruskin, Truth is not separate from and unrelated to Beauty; neither is it the same; it is very much as St. Thomas would say "ratione differens."

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[1] Ibid., p. 95.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

3.

Morality in Art

It has been said that Ruskin recognized the relation between the Beautiful and the Good: that they are the same reality with a logical difference, different aspects of the same thing. Roughly, this phase of the discussion corresponds to Ruskin's notion of morality in art; and, indeed, it would seem the most important part of all.

But to speak of "morality in art," and especially of Ruskin's theory of it, can be very misleading. Ruskin himself used the term "moral" constantly, yet, it does not seem, with full justice to his thought. The objection to it, voiced in an earlier chapter, should be enlarged on.

First of all, to most people "morality" refers to the explicit matter of the Ten Commandments, and especially and almost exclusively to one of them. It does not refer to life as a whole, to a "way of life," the cant phrase adopted in the preceding chapter to denominate what Ruskin was talking about. For instance, how many people would suspect that by "morality" Ruskin intended primarily that praise of God inspired by the revelation of Him in created Beauty? Or that it extended so far as to involve the economic principle of competition?

Again, to most people "morality" looks to the service of God exclusively as a matter of duty or obligation, and that imposed under pain of eternal misery, and to be fulfilled in the fear of God. How many would think to include in it all that is done

simply out of love for God, the works of supererogation that come under the "counsels," or that are considered in themselves "indifferent" and yet can be used in His service? How many would think of these acts as done in joy? in the delight of contemplation? Yet to all these does Ruskin's "way of life" extend.

A third mistake would be common, indeed. To many "morality in art" means "influencing men to do good." They are thinking of the "moral" to the pious tale, to the uplifting characters and thoughts they meet in books. And opposed to this influence for good, they think of that whole complexus of things prohibited by the "Code of the Legion of Decency." Yet Ruskin scarcely considers the possibility of such an influence, and, if memory serves, is very doubtful that Art has such an influence. It is not Art as an influence to good, to the proper service of God and love of our neighbor, that he values, but Art and the contemplation of the Beautiful as the very act of that worship and service.

These are harmless misunderstandings of "morality."But there is one that is very dangerous. It is probably current among men educated in the secular universities and accepting the religious and philosophical views of those who have lost all touch with true Christianity. It supposes that morality is a matter of emotion. Inasmuch as Ruskin denied that the perception of beauty was either sensible or intellectual, but insisted that it was "moral," and that he frequently speaks of these perceptions as feelings, it is easy to accuse him of this error.

Ladd, who may be cited as an example of the man with current

religious and philosophical views, first of all seems scandalized that Ruskin did not quite define "moral" as "proper emotion," or "respectable feelings" - definitions which he puts in quotation marks as if the words of his university masters. But at various times Ladd seems to be sure that Ruskin meant only "respectable feelings." He says:

> . . . suppose also we grant that art is a language, which has emotions as its principal concern, for this is implicit from the first to the last of Ruskin's pages. What then does art do? Does it primarily express this emotion, or does it convey its truths?[1]

After a lift of our metaphysical eye-brow at "truths" of "emotion," we read again:

> Theoretically, however, his position was very important because by relying upon instinctive moral elements . . . emotion itself, which on the one hand is the essence of the appreciative aspect of art . . .[2]

Again, in ascribing to Ruskin the desire to avoid "intellectualism" by accepting the symbolism of Plato - the doctrine that the ektypes in nature have been reduced to material being from the universals, or prototypes - he speaks of Ruskin's "emotional in reading of moral metaphor."[3] That the metaphor which Ruskin found in creation was "moral" and read into it by "emotion" is a hard saying to understand. Probably he intends by his opposition of "emotional in reading" to "intellectualism" to say that while Plato supposed in a material thing a <u>real</u> foundation for its

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[1] <u>Op. cit.</u>, p. 334.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 332.

[3] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 189.

symbolizing the ideal prototype, Ruskin found no real basis in creation for his metaphor, but produced it entirely out of his own being by some process he calls "moral" or "emotional inreading."

Now such an error is not to be charged to Ladd with a great deal of indignation, nor, if he really accepted it, to Ruskin either; they are innocent victims of their environment. For this confusion of emotion with morality, and of both with religion, has an extensive history in modern times. It can be traced back to the sentimental mysticism in Germany in the eighteenth century, to the English sentimentalists - novelists and revivalists - to Rousseau in France, and on down through all the "modernists" that troubled the Church and through the Protestant Liberals. But knowing its history, we need not be surprised that apparently Ruskin made use of some of its terms at least, nor that there are critics today who read in him this error.

To avoid these misunderstandings it would seem better to substitute "religion" for "morality," "religious" for "moral," to designate that relation of Art to the Good of which Ruskin makes so much.

First: Art regards the same reality - the supreme Good, God, and His creation, not simply as the object of the will, but with special reference to the cognoscitive faculties, as that reality is contemplated. It looks to the <u>knowing</u> of God just as well as to <u>acts</u> of service. Now "religion" is that living union with God, not only in acts of service, of obedience to His commandments, but

in our knowledge of Him, and our praise. Hence to describe Ruskin's theory as "religious," or to speak of "religion in art" obviates the first misunderstanding.

Secondly: Religion includes all those matters of the "counsels," and even of "indifferent" acts, which most people do not consider a matter of morality because they are not of obligation; it includes all that is done in joy, gratitude, and out of love rather than fear.

Perhaps the term "religion" would be open to the same misinterpretation of being "emotional" to those to whom religion is emotion, and of being merely a "good influence." But it certainly is more liable to misunderstanding. At any rate let it be understood that Ruskin's "morality" means simply that looking to God as the supreme Good, and to that Good in created being which St. Thomas said is only logically distinct from Beauty.

Surely one of the most startling features of Ruskin's theory, though indeed it is only a corrolary of the basic teaching described above, is that for the right appreciation of the Beautiful Ruskin calls for a morally good man, or better, for a religious man; and for the creation of great works of art, a morally good, or religious, artist. That people aesthetically inclined and that artists generally conform to such demands seems too much against the facts, and consequently Ruskin's theory meets with a smile. But let us hear his argument, taken from the fifteenth chapter of the second volume of Modern Painters, and see how he faces the facts:

. . . If it be the moral part of us to which Beauty addresses itself, how does it happen, it will be asked, that it is ever found in the works of impious men, and how is it possible for such to desire or conceive it.

On the other hand, how does it happen that men in high state of moral culture are often insensible to the influence of material beauty; and insist feebly upon it as an instrument of soul culture?

. . . the right determination of these two questions is indeed the whole end and aim of my labour . . . namely, the proving that no supreme power of art can be attained by impious men, and that the neglect of art, as an interpreter of divine things, has been of evil consequence to the Christian world.

. . . I have, throughout the examination of Typical Beauty, asserted our instinctive sense of it; the moral meaning of it being only discoverable by reflection. Now this instinctive sense of it varies in intensity among men, being given, like the hearing ear in music, to some more than to others; and if those to whom it is given in large measure be unfortunately men of impious or unreflecting spirit, it is very possible that the perception of beauty should be by them cultivated on principles merely aesthetic, and so lose their hallowing power . . . There is in all works of such men a taint and stain, and jarring discord, darker and louder in proportion to the moral deficiency; of which the best proof and measure are to be found in their treatment of the human form . . . of which the highest beauty has been attained only once, and then by no system-taught painter, but by a most holy Dominican monk of Fiesole . . .

But secondly, it is to be noted that it is neither by us ascertainable what moments of pure feeling or aspiration may occur to men of minds apparently cold and lost . . . It seems to me that much of what is great . . . has been wrought by those who neither intended nor knew the good they did . . .

. . . I proceed, therefore, shortly to reply to that other objection urged against the real moral dignity of the faculty, that many Christian men seem to be themselves without it, and even to discountenance it in others.

. . . this falsity is not wholly and in terms admitted, yet it seems to be partly and practically so in much of the doing and teaching even of holy men, who in the recommending of the love of God to us, refer but seldom to those things in which it is most abundantly and immediately shown; though they insist much on His giving of bread and raiment and health . . . they require us not to thank Him for that glory of his works which he has permitted us alone to perceive; they tell

> us often to meditate in the closet . . . but they exhibit not the duty of delight . . . It seems to me that the real sources of bluntness in the feelings towards the splendour of the grass and glory of the flower, are less to be found in ardour of occupation, than in the turning of the eye at intervals of rest too selfishly within . . .[1]

These passages are by no means strong enough to establish his case; but at least they indicate that Ruskin was not blind to the facts.

The lengthy analysis omitted does much to establish that the untrained saint in Fra Angelico reached a beauty achieved by no man less spiritual. How it may be that impious men have their moments of perception of spiritual beauty because they are not wholly bad, is made clear enough. Why it is that many good and holy men are wholly unappreciative of beautiful things, may, or may not, be explained by their "turning the eye too selfishly within." Masters of the ascetical life - a thing which Ruskin professed himself to disapprove - might be willing to grant him something, but with many distinctions . . . Of how the perception of true beauty is learned by a process of ascesis indeed, of the creation of a humble and clean heart, Ruskin has already been quoted from Chapter III of the same volume.

4.

Did Ruskin's Aesthetics Change with His Religious Beliefs?

If the religious element is so strong in Ruskin's theory, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the changes in Ruskin's

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[1] Works, Vol. IV, pp. 210-218.

religious beliefs would mean serious changes in his theories of Art and Beauty. If this supposition were true, the Catholic teacher might, of course, still find it worth while to read such of the work as was written while the author was under Christian inspiration, and to let the rest go. He would nevertheless be happier if he could see that the whole body of Ruskin's thought remained fairly consistent - consistent enough so that his own commentary and correction - necessary at all stages - would not become too cumbersome. And this consistency seems discoverable. Ruskin, when he was professing to deny Christian revelation and when he later became what one man calls a Deist, another a Humanitarian, and others a Christian without Church or dogma, does not recall what he wrote as a professed Christian, except one notion that he takes back only half-heartedly. In fact such a consistency is discoverable in his work that it suggests that Ruskin's religious views were pretty much of one piece, that he was after all a believer even when he most forcibly announced his loss of faith. Wilenski says of his religious belief that it "never fundamentally varied all his life."[1] Ladd summarizes the matter thus:

> All through his life Ruskin held a general belief in the existence of a Ruler and Judging Spiritual Power . . . The changes in the nature of the deity, however, are not a little astonishing.
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> In 1846 the presence of a watchful God hovers over . . . morality at this time is distinctly religious and puritanical, though there is no great emphasis on fear.

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[1] Op. cit., p. 329.

> Praise and awe, however, have actually been carried into the esthetic system. But in 1862 a profound change has occurred. Ruskin writes to his father: ". . . so far from its being difficult or strange for a man to hold his morality when he has lost what is called in modern language religion, I believe that all true nobleness and worthiness only comes out when people cease to think of another world. The relations of God to us have been entirely broken and obscured by human lies."
>
> In 1860, however, the influence of Carlyle . . . along with the breakdown of his earlier theology . . . discovers the transformation of the naturalist's mysticism into that of the impulsive humanitarian . . . Ruskin declares that neither God can be manifest nor nature revealed except through first knowing the human spirit - the man himself . . . "Know thyself; for through thyself only thou canst know God." Thus the concept of the awful father had given way to that of divine benevolence, immanent in man . . . So too had the clafification of a relation between religion and morals. He had set aside the religion of fear and tried to rid his morality of negative, ascetic and supernatural notions . . . "There are many religions, but only one morality."
>
> One may say that although Ruskin believed in the existence of a spiritual power, his conception of the nature of this deity was a matter of change. But the conviction of the instinctiveness, naturalness, and universality of a moral sense, "fastened," as he said, "in the hearts of men," was permanent with him and necessary to all his conclusion on architecture, esthetics, history, and economics.[1]

In this account it is to be noted that Ruskin all his life believed in a "Ruling and Judging Spiritual Power", - a personal God, therefore. Now God scarcely appears otherwise even in what was written in his most believing days; there God never appears instituting a supernatural order; nor is His direct revelation of Himself alluded to as in any way affecting the theory of Beauty; even then Ruskin taught only a "natural theology," easily made

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[1] Op. cit., pp. 163-165.

acceptable to one believing in the supernatural religion because the latter is in no wise contradicted. What is changed in this notion of God and His works when Ruskin "loses his Faith"? At one time, Ladd says, his regard for God was puritanical, though with no emphasis on fear, that it was full of praise and awe; at another time Ruskin would sever morality from all dependence on a hope of heaven, and he believed that our relations with God have been obscured by human lies. Strictly there is no opposition here at all. In the first place it is hard to conceive that Ruskin ever was puritanical; his whole theory of praising God in delight and contemplation of Him in creation seems quite unpuritanical, and, as Ladd says, without emphasis on fear. After the supposed loss of Faith, he retained all his old notions of the relations of man to God, except that he would indeed withdraw from man all hope of heaven, all fear of hell, as the motive for maintaining these relations. But when did he in his aesthetics ever preach such hope or such fear? Are they implied in the praise of God through contemplation of nature? Not only had he never preached them while he was a believer, but he never denied them afterwards; he but asserted that "true" virtues only come out when other motives are present. This is not true indeed, as it stands; a Catholic would say that the <u>highest perfection</u> of virtue only comes out when the motive of love is <u>also</u> present. But with this qualification, he can maintain his original position that Beauty helps us to serve God out of love rather than of fear.

The transformation, especially as it was under the influence of Carlyle, and as it embraced the "Gospel of Work," did put more stress on good works than did his original Calvinism; and Ruskin does overstress it, putting aside Faith and the worship of a visible Church, and so far he cannot be followed; but his is the partial truth, the obscured truth of the fallible mind unprotected by infallible religion.

In another place, Ladd, after saying that "He is the apotheosis of contradiction in the period," specifies that:

> At one moment he is discovering moral law, almost a pantheistic deity in the world of natural phenomena; at another he is disinclined toward the "moral of landscape" in the interests of hard work or human nature.[1]

Granted that in Ruskin's own mind there was a shift of the religious beliefs behind these two statements, yet in themselves they are not contradictory; in fact the two appear together as complementary parts of his doctrine; - the praise of God as seen in Nature and the learning from it to live, to "work hard," the "Gospel of Work." And again, that a man brought up in the Protestant tradition of electing his own beliefs should have been shocked to find himself "At one moment quoting Richard Hooker; at another pleased with Rousseau . . ." is hardly to be expected, as Ladd seems to in this summary of Ruskin's inconsistencies.

There too he says of Ruskin that "almost simultaneously he is founding beauty on sensual pleasure, admitting the relativity of taste and dedicating art to the glory of God about whom he

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[1] Op. cit., p. 321.

admitted he knew little." It is this sort of criticism that drives a reader almost to the conclusion that Ruskin was never inconsistent at all. "The founding of beauty on sensual pleasure" means in Ruskin what it means to any Catholic metaphysician: the senses provide the data of our higher cognitions, and of our perceptions of the beautiful; they do not constitute its essence; such teaching is not self-contradictory, nor does it contradict any "dedication of art to the glory of God." And where is the contradiction in "dedicating art to the glory of God" while admitting that he knew little about Him? Enough is known to the Christian to make such dedication most reasonable, if not logically necessary.

Wilenski has some interesting remarks on the inconsistencies that are supposed to have grown out of Ruskin's changes of religious belief. He says:

> I have already given his own explanation of his continued use of Biblical quotations after 1860. Here we must realize that from an early period this was largely automatic - a form of perseveration. But his use of these quotations in the 'sixties was also due to other factors . . . In ordinary social life he did not like to make himself conspicuous . . . and he was unaffected in conversation because he was always unconsciously attempting to appear normal and to conceal his mental ills . . . But on the lecture platform . . . the parade of his Biblical erudition satisfied his exhibitionism.[1]

One may reasonably ask whether the parade of psychological erudition in this confessed amateur - "automatic," "form of perseveration," "exhibitionism," this talk of suppressing the

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[1] Op. cit., p. 364.

"mental ills" - may not mean that in Ruskin his religious beliefs were not altogether lost, that though he was scarcely aware of it he still believed the Bible the Word of God? If we are to be psychological analysts, can we not discover, or at least propose as an interesting hypothesis, that Ruskin's religious beliefs "automatically perseverated" (I suppose one must not say persevered)? Wilenski continues the same charge:

> This Ruskin who had said in the Seven Lamps that all questions . . . were most conclusively solved by reference to God's Revelation . . . had reached a point in 1867 where he admits that he deduces the principles of action, first from the laws and facts of nature - i.e. on the basis of his personal experience . . . and then reinforces his precepts from the Bible which some of his audience think the Word of God.[1]

Although there is no inconsistency in deducing principles now from the Bible and now from experience and the laws of nature, as we see it done commonly by Catholic theologians and philosophers, there is involved here what might well appear to be hypocrisy in Ruskin's quoting Scripture to his audiences after he had ceased to believe in it. Ruskin openly confessed to doing just this. Now he often uses hard words of himself: no critic is more contemptuous than at times he is of himself. Perhaps this is one of those occasions, and why should we not be good amateur psychologists and, refusing to take him at his word, seek in his subconscious the true cause of his continuing to quote the Word of God, namely, that he still believed in it?

Perhaps the most obvious of Ruskin's supposedly many

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[1] Ibid., p. 343.

inconsistencies is that in his attitude toward the qualifications of the great artist. Along with his conviction that Beauty was essentially the reflection of divine attributes in creation it was only reasonable to suppose that it would be best grasped by those whose purity of heart and spiritual strength made them most ready to apprehend such a revelation. And so he spoke in his believing years. Wilenski records this change in religious belief and aesthetic theory as taking place together in a year of crisis, 1858,[1] quoting on the one hand four of Ruskin's later comments on the critical incident, and on the other, the statements of Ruskin's changed view of the artist.

The occasion was a day in Turin, in 1858, when Ruskin passed from viewing the art of Paul Veronese in the Turin Gallery to hearing a Waldensian preacher in a small chapel of that sect in the same town. Wilenski quotes the Diary for 1858:[2]

> Is this mighty Paul Veronese . . . a servant of the devil? and is this poor little wretch in a tidy black tie . . . a servant of God?

Then from letter 76 in Fors, of April, 1877:

> In 1858 it was, with me, Protestantism or nothing; the crisis of the whole turn of my thoughts . . . when from Paul Veronese's "Queen of Sheba," and under quite overwhelming sense of his God-given power, I went away to a Waldensian Chapel, where a little squeaking . . . was preaching . . . that they were the only children of God in Turin . . . I came out of the chapel in sum of twenty years of thought a conclusively un-converted man . . . what is left? You will find what was left, as, in much darkness and sorrow of heart I gathered it . . .

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[1] Ibid., p. 231.

[2] Ibid., pp. 338-340.

> variously taught in my books, written between 1858 and 1874.

Once more, from Praeterita, Vol. III, Chapter I, paragraph 23, written in 1888:

> . . . that hour's meditation in the gallery of Turin only concluded the course of thought which had been leading me to such end through many years. There was no sudden conversion possible . . . But that day my evangelical beliefs were put away to be debated no more . . .

Whereupon the irrepressible Wilenski comments that this ". . . was not a sudden revolt . . . but a manic desire to proclaim his loss of faith," and ends the history thus:

> When he recovered from the excitement of the defiance, his earlier personal religion became a simple belief in God and in a Religion of Humanity - a religion which served the Creator by doing kindness and justice on earth . . . concepts of the Fall, of Redemption, of Eternal Punishment and Immortal life are all eliminated.

Let us see now, after his critics have made the most of the matter, what changes in his theory of Art are really involved in this loss of faith in a Christian sect: First of all, he still believes in God, though he rejects any Church and its dogmas; but, as has been already remarked there is little in Ruskin's early teaching that requires anything more than a belief in a personal God; his dogmatic beliefs did not much contribute to his philosophy of Art. It is not for loss of dogmatic belief that any change came in that philosophy. Unrelated to this religious change, but parallel to it and arising from the same occasion, there did come a change in his notion of what the artist must be. He saw on the one hand the glorious power of Veronese, the artist, perhaps the

pagan; on the other he saw the pitiable weakness, the narrowness, of the professed minister of Christianity, the "spiritual" man. He became confused. Still believing in God, he felt there must be something God-like in the artist, but this something was not explainable by the pietism of the Waldensian minister.

Here, with Wilenski, we may quote from Ruskin's "Notes on the Turin Gallery" from the Diary, 1858:

> Certainly it seems intended that strong and frank animality, rejecting all tendency to asceticism, monachism, pietism, should be connected with the strongest intellects . . . Dante, indeed, is severe . . . But Homer, Shakespere, Tintoret, Veronese, Titian, Michael Angelo . . . are all boldly Animal . . . Francia and Angelico and all the purists, however beautiful, are poor weak creatures in comparison. I don't understand it; one would have thought that purity gave strength, but it doesn't . . . It is a great mystery. I begin to believe we are all mistaken together - Paul Veronese in letting his power waste into wantonness, and the religious people in mistaking their weakness and dullness for seriousness and piety.

After all, is this so new a thought in Ruskin? so great a change? He struggled with these same difficulties years earlier in the second volume of Modern Painters; and the solutions then found are not invalid: that saintly people have their limitations; that impious men are not wholly evil; that there is still in them the Mirror, though it is Dark - that mirror in which man reads the image of God.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT OF RUSKIN'S VIEWS: ARCHITECTURE

Just as the central thought of Ruskin's work may be found in the chapter on "The Nature of Gothic" in the Stones of Venice, so the decisive step toward that central position was taken after he had completed the second volume of Modern Painters in 1846. His interest and attention, for one reason and another, turned to architecture, and after three years of intensive study of the buildings of Venice, northern Italy, and northern France he published in 1849 The Seven Lamps of Architecture. It was to be in his studies of architecture, rather than in his first interest in painting, that he was to realize fully what was scarcely more than implicit in his early writing: that vital connection between art and the whole social order, the exposition of which is his peculiar claim to greatness. And here in the Seven Lamps that view begins to take definite form.

He wrote in the introduction:

> . . . have long felt convinced of the necessity, in order to its [architecture's] progress, of some determined effort to extricate from the confused mass of partial traditions and dogmata . . . those large principles of right which are applicable to every stage and style of it . . . some general, and irrefragable laws of right - laws which based upon man's nature, not upon his knowledge, may possess so far the unchangeableness of the one, as that neither the increase nor the

> imperfection of the other may be able to assault or invalidate them . . . it has been just said, that there is no branch of human work whose constant laws have not close analogy with those which govern every other mode of man's exertion. But more than this . . . we shall find them passing the mere condition of connection or analogy, and becoming the actual expression of some ultimate nerve fibre of mighty laws which govern the moral world . . . and the truth, decision, and temperance, which we reverently regard as honourable condition of the spiritual being have a representative or derivative influence over the works of the hand, the movements of the frame and the action of the intellect.[1]

The first of these "mighty laws," or "lamps" to guide, is the "Lamp of Sacrifice."

1.

"The Lamp of Sacrifice."

Because it may be taken as the first of those definite steps which were to march in a direction so peculiarly Ruskin's, "The Lamp of Sacrifice" is offered the Catholic teacher to see what he will make of it. The argument of it is as follows:

> . . . of the principles which I would endeavour to develope, which all must be, as I have said, applicable to every state and style of the art, some . . . have necessarily fuller reference to one kind of building than another; and among these I would place first that spirit which . . . has nevertheless such especial reference to devotional and memorial architecture - the spirit which offers for such work precious things, simply because they are precious . . . as an offering, surrendering, and sacrifice of what is to ourselves desirable . . .
>
> Of this feeling then, there are two distinct forms: the first, the wish to exercise self-denial for the sake of self-discipline merely . . .
>
> . . . in the second branch . . . the justice of the feeling . . . depends on our answer . . . Can the Deity

[1] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 20-23.

> be indeed honoured by the presentation to Him of any material objects of value . . .?[1]

Ruskin asks, as the sacrifice of Moses was to prefigure the Redemption, was it necessary to its completeness as a type that it should be costly? should it be the best of the flock? There was in these things an awful danger to the Jews as they were so much like the sacrifices of the idolatrous, and yet God demanded

> . . . for Himself such honours . . . And for what reason? . . . There was but one reason, and that an eternal one, that as His covenant was accompanied with some external sign of its continuance . . . so the acceptance of that covenant might be marked and signified by men, in some external sign of their love and obedience, and surrender of themselves and theirs to His will; and that their gratitude to Him and continual remembrance of Him, might have at once their expression, and their enduring testimony, in the presentation to Him, not only of the firstlings of the herd and fold, not only of the fruits of the earth and the tithe of time, but of all treasures of wisdom and beauty; of the thought that invents, and the hand that labours; of wealth of wood, and weight of stone; of the strength of iron, and the light of gold.
>
> And let us not now lose sight of this broad and unabrogated principle - I might say incapable of being abrogated so long as men shall receive earthly gifts from God.
>
> It has been said . . . that a better and more honourable offering is made to our Master in ministry to the poor, in extending the knowledge of His name, in the practice of the virtues by which that name is hallowed. Assuredly . . . but let us examine ourselves . . . The question is not between God's house and His poor . . . It is between God's house and ours . . . I do not understand the feelings which would arch our own gates and pave our own thresholds and leave the church with its narrow door and footworn sill . . . I say this, that the tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaninglessly lost in domestic discomforts and incumbrances, would, if collectively offered and wisely employed, build a marble church for every town in England . . .
>
> I do not want marble churches at all for their own

[1] Ibid., pp. 29-53.

> sake, but for the sake of the spirit that would build them. The church has no need of any visible splendours . . . The simplicity of a pastoral sanctuary is lovelier than the majesty of an urban temple . . . It is not the church we want, but the sacrifice; not the emotion of admiration, but the act of adoration; not the gift, but the giving . . .
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> . . . The payment of those first fruits was nevertheless rewarded . . . by the increase of those possessions . . . Therefore . . . the arts will never flourish until they have been primarily devoted to that service - devoted, both by architect and employer; by the one in scrupulous, earnest, affectionate design; by the other in expenditure at least more frank, at least less calculating than that which he would admit in the indulgence of his own private feelings . . . There would be such an impulse and vitality given to art as it has not felt since the thirteenth century . . .
>
> . . . ours has as constantly the look of money's worth, of a stopping short wherever and whenever we can, of a lazy compliance with low conditions . . . if you cannot afford marble, use Caen stone, but from the best bed; and if not stone, brick, but the best brick; preferring always what is good of a lower order of work or material, to what is bad of a higher. . .

Such is the main argument; there follow some valuable observations, valuable for the criticism of architecture, but not essential to the main idea. But the essay closes on a last application and reiteration of the idea of sacrifice:

> . . . All else for which the builders sacrificed has passed away - all their living interests, and aims, and achievements. We know not for what they laboured, and we see no evidence of their reward. Victory, wealth, authority, happiness - all have departed, though bought by many a bitter sacrifice; but of them, and their life and their toil upon the earth, one reward, one evidence, is left to us in those gray heaps of deep-wrought stone. They have taken with them to the grave their powers, their honours and their errors; but they have left us their adoration.

Well, what is the Catholic teacher to think of this? Surely, he may say, there are few such sustained passages in English literature of immediate meaning to him and to those he

teaches. The appositeness to one of his first duties, and of every Catholic and Christian, the duty of worship; the mood; the imaginative power; the music of its words - all recommend themselves to him as something that is at once - to make use of the familiar if utterly wrong distinction - at once a great piece of literature and an inspiration to Faith.

But is this first impression to be confirmed by second thought on it? After all, has this great passage that distinctly Catholic quality, that something beyond a vague "moral feeling," beyond a mere naturalism which would make it equally acceptable to the Protestant, to the Deist, to the Pagan? Is there here any note of the religious, even of the supernatural, as it has been already distinguished from mere morality? Yet, it has.

For today "The Lamp of Sacrifice" has its obvious meaning only for the Catholic, indeed a meaning for him that apparently it could not have had for Ruskin himself, for Ruskin the Evangelical Protestant or Ruskin the Humanitarian. What means the building and adornment of a House of God, all the expenditure and labor on fine limestone and marble, fine wood, on carving and painting and stained glass to the Protestant whose church is at most a meetinghouse, where indeed there is the worship of song and prayer offered to God, but where there is no true sacrifice, and where God does not dwell, body and soul, humanity and divinity? What does all this mean to the deist who would worship God in Nature and without temple at all? Surely, it would seem to be so much empty sound and "religious" enthusiasm to any of these.

Only to the Catholic who can build a true House of God, one which He will inhabit under the species of bread, one which will house the Sacrifice of the Mass, will this mean anything at all.

And it is one of the strange things about Ruskin, or the s trange, which first of all suggested that something truly Catholic might be had from this man, now Evangelical, now of the religion of Humanity, that he wrote better than he knew and that, as in the "Lamp of Sacrifice," he wrote to the heart of Catholics what apparently could have meant little to himself.

That this spirit of Sacrifice in the architect and painter and sculptor and musician is, in concept, a supernatural thing need not be asserted. It may be called a dictate of the natural reason, unilluminated by God, that man must worship God and acknowledge his dependence and God's supreme dominion by offering to Him the best of goods and works; it may be insisted that man, outside the influence of God's supernatural aids, has continually and everywhere in the world offered God sacrifices and adorned temples in the spirit of sacrifice. But it is also true that only to the Catholic is this natural instinct or reasonable service joined to a supernatural act of worship - the Sacrifice of the Cross mystically repeated in the Mass. It is then to Catholics, and only to Catholics, that "The Lamp of Sacrifice" carries its fullest meaning.

It is obvious then how Ruskin shows us one function of the Artist in Society, to express in painting and sculpture and architecture that spirit of sacrifice by which the Christian, as

member of the Mystical Body of Christ, represents in his life and works that Sacrifice of Christ of Whom he is a member: how Ruskin shows us how Art is drawn as a vital part into that circle of Life, a supernatural life which vivifies and elevates all phases of the natural life of man. But it is also true that we see here a definite step of Ruskin's toward that view of the Artist in Society as the laboring man, the craftsman, in the economic world.

What dominated that view when first clearly formulated in "The Nature of Gothic" was that the laboring man should not be the slave of another's mind but a creative artist or craftsman. And it is here in this essay before us that we see how this may be and how it may be encouraged. For the essence of this spirit of sacrifice is the costliness of the offering of labor of mind and of hand; a costliness that cannot be achieved by the economies of machine production, of the short cuts to showy effects, but only by the long labor of many men, each working out some invention of his own in the carving of capitals or niches or the figures of saints, in the painting of pictures.

Such painstaking in our churches alone would require no inconsiderable number of artisans, but the total effect of insisting on it as part of a sacrifice offered to God will, to follow the mind of Ruskin, be much greater. For he says, this principle "must be . . . applicable to every stage and style of art" although it has a more immediate reference to art devoted to worship. As a habit of mind that looks for such work in churches is strengthened, it will look for such work in all forms of art and

will come to prize whatever has the marks on it of the maker's invention and wherever in all the things we use and make this element of original design can find place.

2.

"The Lamp of Truth"

One of the most interesting experiences in teaching literature is the reading with a class of Catholic students - at any rate, with seminarians - of "The Lamp of Truth," the second essay of The Seven Lamps of Architecture, in which is developed the second principle which architecture must hold by in company with all other human activities. It is so interesting an experience because Ruskin's ideas here meet an opposition where it might least be expected. It is easily pointed out to seminarians that here is an idea that must concern them every day of their lives in the ministry; that it is fundamental to the beauty of the churches in which they will every day minister.

But when this idea of truth in the building and decoration of churches is explained to them by Ruskin, and when they are asked to examine from memory the churches with which they are familiar and to see how this idea, or principle, has been followed out in them, there invariably and suddenly appears in the class a strong chorus of dissent. They well remember this instance or that of the violation of truth which they have witnessed - the "Gothic" vault done in plaster and spanning, as a low ceiling, a nave of sixty feet or more; the "marble" shafts or wainscotting which a close inspection, or even a long range

glance, discloses to be painted plaster; the patented composition of which the grandiose altar is made; these and other instances like them occur to the students at a moment's reflection. But they do not recoil now in horror at the indignities shown the house of God in the name of architecture! Rather they rise in eager defense of what they have learned all their lives to love! That altar has always looked so magnificent! The shafts of the nave arcade were so rich in the dim light! That vault was so much like that of a cathedral they had seen pictured!

But graduall y the idea takes hold; the objections die away; perhaps a few years later, the seminarian, now near the end of his course, discusses in an academy some phase of liturgy or ecclesiastical art, and the principle of truth in architecture appears now to be taken for granted; and again perhaps, years later the one-time seminarian will build a church, or add to, or redecorate an old one, and he will insist that the architect with a mind for shams - if at that future day such an architect will still be at large - submit himself to the limitations of truthfulness in his materials and construction. And so the Catholic teacher thanks Ruskin for right instruction in so lovely a branch of Catholic culture as its art and architecture.

The substance of this essay is not easy to present. The matter is too closely argued to be represented by a summary or a series of phrases chosen from the text. And yet this very quality is what should very much be insisted on in any proper appreciation of Ruskin. He needs some defense against that

conventional conception of him, the formula of the writer of "purple patches," of the inconsistent, self-contradictory thinker; of the amateur of the arts, of the moralizer whose dreamy gaze allows him to read into the arts what could not possibly be there. And that defense can only be made by showing the closeness of this argument - whether finally right or wrong - and the detail of his analysis. What follows therefore will sketch in very few lines his main argument in "The Lamp of Truth," but here and there will include his full exposition of a particular point. First let him speak for himself:

> . . . I would have the Spirit or Lamp of Truth clear in the hearts of our artists and handicraftsmen, not as if the truthful practice of handicrafts could far advance the cause of truth, but because I would fain see the handicrafts themselves urged by the spurs of chivalry; and it is, indeed, marvellous to see what power and universality there are in this single principle, and how in the consulting or forgetting of it lies half the dignity or decline of every art and act of man.[1]

It is well to note the proposition here laid down. It is with no delusion that deceits in architecture have undermined the morals of men that Ruskin writes this. Rather it is the evil retribution that architecture has brought on itself; and that, not in the immediate effect of a piece of structural shamming on those who see it, but in the destruction of style itself when shams have become a habit. It is well too to note what immediately follows: "I have before endeavoured to show its range and power in painting; and I believe a volume, instead of a chapter, might

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[1] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 57.

be written on its authority over all that is great in architecture."[1]

Reasonable objection might be taken to Ruskin's use of the term "truth" to stand for one thing in painting and another in architecture. Much of Modern Painters deals with the nature of truth in art, and rather roughly summarizing his doctrine, Ruskin means by it that imitation of the forms of Nature by imaginative selection and conventional abstraction. But in architecture he does not mean by "truth" the right imitation of anything, but to present to the eye materials and their construction just as in fact they are. In a word, he means "sincerity" as opposed to pretence or sham that plaster is marble, that a steel supported lath ceiling is a stone vault.

The argument enters into its main course when Ruskin lists architectural shams under three heads:

> 1st. The suggestion of a mode of structure or support, other than the true one; as in pendants of late Gothic roofs.
> 2nd. The painting of surfaces to represent some other material than that of which they actually consist (as in the marbling of wood,) or the deceptive representation of sculptured ornament upon them.
> 3rd. The use of cast or machine-made ornaments of any kind.[2]

Of structural deceits, "the determined and purposed suggestion of a mode of support other than the true one," Ruskin does not at once give such obvious examples as we ourselves are

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 60.

familiar with, but later he names one under the head of "surface deceits": "Thus, for instance, the roof of Milan Cathedral is seemingly covered with elaborate fan tracery, forcibly enough painted to enable it, in its dark and removed position to deceive a careless observer." But just as the general principle is fairly clear in its enunciation, so for its refinement we must go to one of those detailed analyses which are the most notable features of Ruskin's writing but apparently have never become part of his legend. Such is the long passage in which he studies the apparent deception in the Gothic mode of supporting its high cathedral vaults, and which can be found in this essay on "Truth."[1]

While introducing the most important piece of analysis in this essay, Ruskin gives another definition of the matter which may be more satisfactory to the modern artist, and uses almost the cant phrase "respect for the medium" which the modern so willingly accepts. Ruskin says:

> I would remind the architect who thinks that I am unnecessarily and narrowly limiting his resources or his art, that the highest greatness and the highest wisdom are shown, the first by a noble submission to, the second by a thoughtful providence for, certain voluntarily admitted restraints.[2]

He is, indeed, leading up to that failure of the Gothic builders to "respect the medium" which he says led to the destruction of Gothic architecture. In this excellent piece of analysis of Gothic tracery and its evolution he shows brilliantly the force

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[1] Ibid., pp. 61, 62, 63.

[2] Ibid., p. 71.

of that idea with which he began, "how in the consulting or forgetting of this principle lies half the dignity or decline of every art . . ."

The argument is this: Following Willis' account of the origin of tracery,[1] Ruskin explains how the original shield of stone that filled the space of the arch of the windows was pierced to produce a design in light. This sort of work marked the period of early Gothic. Gradually the penetrations came to take more and more of the space until between the lights there were only narrow bars of stone. Ruskin says of this stage of development:

> . . . it was at the instant when the rudeness of the intermediate space had been finally conquered, when the light had expanded to its fullest, and yet had not lost its radiant unity, principality, and visible first causing of the whole, that we have the most exquisite feeling and most faultless judgments in the management alike of the tracery and the decorations.[2]

The moment, says Ruskin, was "the great water-shed of Gothic art. Before it, all had been ascent; after it, all was decline . . ." And he continues, "The change of which I speak, is expressible in few words: but one more important, more radically influential, could not be. It was the substitution of the line for the mass, as an element of decoration."[3] He more vividly describes this moment, or pause of some fifty years which constituted the great period of Gothic at the beginning of the thirteenth century:

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[1] R. Willis, Remarks on the Architecture of the Middle Ages, Cambridge, 1835.

[2] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 89.

[3] Ibid., p. 90.

> Up to that time, up to the very last instant in which the reduction and thinning of the intervening stone was consummated, his eye had been on the openings only, on the stars of light; he did not care about the stone; a rude border of moulding was all he needed; it was the penetrating shape which he was watching. But when that shape had received its last possible expansion, and when the stone-work became an arrangement of graceful and parallel lines, that arrangement, like some form in a picture, unseen and accidentally developed, struck suddenly, inevitably, on the sight. It had literally not been seen before. It flashed out in an instant, as an independent form. It became a feature of the work. The architect took it under his care, thought over it, and distributed its members as we see.
>
> The reader will observe that, up to the last expansion of the penetrations, the stone-work was necessarily considered, as it actually is, stiff and unyielding. It was so also, during the pause of which I have spoken, when the forms of the tracery were still severe and pure; delicate indeed, but perfectly firm.
>
> At the close of the period of pause, the first sign of serious change was like a low breeze, passing through the emaciated tracery, and making it tremble. It began to undulate like the threads of a cobweb lifted by the wind. It lost its essence as structure of stone. Reduced to the slenderness of threads, it began to be considered as possessing also their flexibility. The architect was pleased . . . This was a change which sacrificed a great principle of truth; it sacrificed the expression of the qualities of the material; and . . . it was ultimately ruinous.[1]

Ruskin, at this point, with a careful eye for the apparent contradiction between what he here asserts to be a falsification of the material and what he previously asserted was right, the appearance of elasticity in the Gothic pier with its tree-like branching vault-ribs, insists that there is a difference between the elasticity of the one impression and the ductility of the other. The tree-like appearance was not sought, could not, indeed, be avoided; the latter impression was deliberately assumed;

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[1] Ibid., p. 91.

the one had some basis in the nature of the material, the other, none. The last stage in the development is thus described by Ruskin:

> But the declining and morbid taste of the later architects was not satisfied with thus much deception; they were delighted with the subtle charm they had created, and thought only of increasing its power. The next step was to consider and represent the tracery, as not only ductile, but penetrable; and when two mouldings met each other, to manage their intersection so that one should appear to pass through the other, retaining its independence; or when two ran parallel to each other, to represent the one as partly contained within the other, and partly apparent above it. This form of falsity was that which crushed the art. The flexible traceries were often beautiful, though they were ignoble; but the penetrated traceries, rendered, as they finally were, merely the means of exhibiting the dexterity of the stone-cutter, annihilated both the beauty and dignity of the Gothic types.[1]

Ruskin follows this by no means sketchy analysis with a long passage of such detail and complexity that it cannot, as he says himself, be followed without illustrative drawings. But the passage is surely as characteristic of Ruskin in its thoughtful care for every step in his progress and for the objections of his readers as is that magnificent "purple patch" that closes the essay - not a mere purple patch sewn on for extraneous decoration -though Ruskin himself said of it, "The closing paragraph is very pretty"- but to the unsophisticated reader a burst at last of all the pent up indignation for a lost art that had been restrained while a long and complex argument had been patiently built up.

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[1] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 93.

3.

"The Lamp of Obedience"

Ruskin begins the last of the Seven Lamps, "The Lamp of Obedience," with these words: "It has been my endeavour to show in the preceding pages how every form of noble architecture is in some sort the embodiment of the Polity, Life, History, and Religious Faith of nations." The sentence more explicitly indicates that essence of Ruskin's thought, that all things within human experience are to be drawn into one view and circle of life and society, than anything that he has said so far in these essays. It is because of this unity in his view that he is of some interest to those who would teach a Catholic culture which likewise insists on this unity.

Obedience, "the crowning grace," as Ruskin calls it, of all the principles "which direct that embodiment" of all elements in the one, great unity, is of special interest to the Catholic teacher. Not because the notion of it is beyond the reach of natural reason, for reason, studying the necessary relation of creature and Creator, would discover it; but he finds it inextricably bound to his Catholic culture and to it peculiarly in this: it is a notion that can maintain itself in the world and it is a virtue that can be continually practised and by men in general only through the supernatural aid that God may give. For obedience, the submission of the heart, of mind and will, to the authority of another demands humility; and humility has never been the

mark of a pagan or atheist society.

Therefore it is not only of architecture that Ruskin was thinking when he wrote the "Lamp of Obedience," but of the whole way of Christian life. Ruskin's thought was not only of the obedience of the architect, but of that political and moral obedience against which the forces of the French Revolution and the revolutions of that very moment when he wrote in 1848 were struggling. And in the readings today selected to preach Democracy and Individualism and Liberty to the youth in school and college, there is little likely to be found that which Ruskin upheld so strongly:

> . . . how franctic the pursuit of that treacherous phantom which men call liberty; most treacherous, indeed, of all phantoms; for the feeblest ray of reason might surely show us, that not only its attainment, but its being, was impossible. There is no such thing in the universe. There never can be. The stars have it not; the earth has it not; the sea has it not; and we men have the mockery and semblance of it only for our heaviest punishment . . . if there be any one principle more widely than another confessed by every utterance, or more sternly than another imprinted on every atom of the visible creation, that principle is not Liberty, but Law.[1]

But what has architecture to do with obedience? It is true that the a rchitect is not morally bound to any of his "authorities," if such be admitted at all; but it can reasonably be asserted that only that architect who has learned humility and obedience where they are, in their strict and more familiar sense, called for, will have the humility requisite to submit himself to

[1] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 248.

authorities that would over-rule his artistic vagaries. Of this more later.

Ruskin begins the argument for obedience in architecture with this proposition and with a word that, especially, defines what he means by obedience:

> . . . this one condition has been constant, this one requirement clear in all places and at all times, that the work shall be that of a school, that no individual caprice shall dispense with, or materially vary, accepted types and customary decorations . . .

Further, he defines obedience by its opposite, "originality." The very word gives occasion for some remarks aside from Ruskin's that may show how closely this "moralizing" of his is bound up with the thought of critics of art in general. "Originality" suggests "individualism"; the one term means pretty much the same as the other; only the latter has a wider application. For it is used by historians, as well as by art critics, and by all thinkers on social matters, to denote a phase of that shift of culture from the medieval to the modern, from Catholicism to Naturalism. It signifies that specious valuation of the individual man which came in with the Renaissance, which flowered in Democracy, which made every man his own interpreter of Scripture and freed every artist from the "shackles of out-worn convention." It is when we see its full, broad application that we can more easily see that it is no matter merely of the rules of art, but that it is of the moral order first of all. This Individualism is a revolt against authority - a Catholic thinker would say a wrong one; it is of the will as well as of the intellect. What

is of moment here is that it takes "originality" with it into the moral order; that those who revolt against the principles of their arts, and would constantly assert their originality against all precedent, are, for the most part, living in the spirit of revolt against every authority. The critics and philosophers of art then are really engaged on one and the same problem with Ruskin when they speak of originality and individualism and he speaks of obedience.

"A day never passes without our hearing our English architects called upon to be original, and to invent a new style," says Ruskin,[1] and he might say the same today when he would hear the protests against the eclecticism which works, at the client's choice, in Norman Romanesque, early French Renaissance, Tudor, Queen Anne, Dutch Colonial, Byzantine; and would hear the demand for something "expressive" of our modern civilization, and see the various answers described as moderne. Ruskin's answer is that "it does not matter one marble splinter whether we have an old or new architecture, but it matters everything whether we have an architecture whose laws might be taught at our schools . . ." And then to the eye-brow raised at his apparent disdain for originality he explains:

> There seems to me to be a wonderful misunderstanding among the majority of architects of the present day as to the very nature and meaning of Originality, and of all wherein it consists. Originality in expression does not depend on invention of new words; nor originality in poetry on invention of new measures; nor in

[1] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 252.

> painting on invention of new colours, or new modes of using them . . . Granting that they may be, such additions or alterations are much more the work of time and of multitudes than of individual inventors . . . Originality depends on nothing of the kind; a man who has the gift, will take up any style that is going, the style of his day, and will work in that, and be great in that, and make everything that he does in it look as fresh as if every thought of it had just come down from heaven . . . And though it is the nobility of the highest creatures to look forward to, and partly understand the changes which are appointed for them . . . yet it is the strength of every creature, be it changeful or not, to rest, for the time being, contented with the conditions of its existence, and striving only to bring about the changes which it desires, by fulfilling to the uttermost the duties for which its present state is appointed and continued.
>
> Neither originality, therefore, nor change . . . is ever to be sought in itself, or can ever be healthily obtained by any struggle or rebellion against common laws.[1]

That obedience means that the architect should follow a school, that he should work in a tradition, that he should not seek originality for its own sake, nor to create a new style because weary of an old, is clear enough. Ruskin goes on to show in more detail how this obedience is to be practised, and in the vivid picture of that process it becomes clear how obedience can produce the good fruit that he promised. Perhaps here, too, it will be easiest of of all to see how a moral quality spreads through an artistic activity as it does through the polity, the economics, the social customs of a people.

He begins with this simple illustration to show how the architect is to learn with the guidance of authority and how in this way something truly "original" may come about:

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[1] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 253 ff.

> When we begin to teach children writing, we force them to absolute copyism and require absolute accuracy in the formation of the letters; as they obtain command of the received modes of literal expression, we cannot prevent their falling into such variations as are consistent with feeling, their circumstances, or their characters. So, when a boy is first taught to write Latin, an authority is required of him for every expression he uses; as he becomes master of the language he may take a license, and feel his right to do so without any authority, and yet write better Latin than when he borrowed every separate expression. In the same way our architects would have to be taught to write the accepted style. We must first determine what buildings are to be considered Augustan in their authority . . . under this absolute, irrefragable authority, we are to begin to work . . . when we can speak this dead language naturally, and apply it to whatever ideas we have to render, that is to say, to every practical purpose of life; then, and not till then . . . it might come to pass that a new style should arise . . .[1]

Ruskin has shown what he means by obedience, and how it is the first condition of learning the art. He thus sums up the results in the architect who has so trained himself:

> It is almost impossible for us to conceive, in our present state of doubt and ignorance, the sudden dawn of intelligence and fancy, the rapidly increasing sense of power and facility, and, in its proper sense, of Freedom, which such wholesome restraint would instantly cause throughout the whole circle of arts. Freed from the agitation and embarrassment of that liberty of choice which is the cause of half the discomforts of the world; freed from the accompanying necessity of studying all past, present or even possible styles; and enabled, by concentration of individual, and co-operation of multitudinous energy, to penetrate into the uttermost secrets of the adopted style, the architect would find his whole understanding enlarged, his practical knowledge certain and ready to hand, and his imagination playful and vigorous . . .[2]

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[1] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 257.

[2] Ibid., p. 259.

4.

"The Nature of Gothic"

In 1853, ten years after the inception of his serious work, four years after the thought had been fore-shadowed in The Seven Lamps, and two years since the beginning of The Stones of Venice, his greatest piece of work, came its second volume. In the middle of this, the second of a three volume work, was a chapter he called "The Nature of Gothic." Here, dealing with one of the qualities of that style, was a section with the unpromising heading of "Savageness"; but on six of these pages,[1] with magnificence of imagination, with a straight marching logic, with all the stirring sound of language he had at his command, he wrote the greatest words of his life, the very core of all the doctrine he was later to preach, the central thought toward which he had all along been moving and from which radiated everything of value he had yet to say. Afterwards he was to say much that was trivial, much that was fantastic, much that was absurd; but all that was great in him in later times depended from this great moment. Of this passage no one of the trite criticisms can be made: that it is a "purple patch," that it is self-contradictory, that it is trivial or fantastic or dreaming or moralizing. It is one of the great passages of our literature.

Seven years later, and after the completion of the long labor of Modern Painters, he would announce in Unto this Last the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 90-95.

turning of his mind definitely from art to economics, or better, to social reconstruction. But it is here in "The Nature of Gothic" that the union of the two movements of thought takes place in such perfect fusion that the man has ceased to be simply an art critic and become, not less a critic of art, but something much more.

It is the one element of his mind for which he has been most abused that made this fusion of art critic and social thinker possible. It is his so-called "moralizing." Misnamed, it is really his power to see that in the life of man there is but one thing, and in that all is contained in inter-related complexity; that neither art nor economics can be understood without referring them to God by way of understanding that nature in which Man was created for His service. And here now is the moment of fusion.

He explains at the very beginning of the chapter his scheme for analyzing the nature of Gothic architecture by looking to internal qualities, what was primarily of the character of the architect, rather than of the external forms of what he built. Ruskin names some six of which the first is the quality of "savageness," the characteristic of a people just removed from the barbarism of the northern tribes of Europe. But this, he says, "may be considered, in some sort a noble character; it possesses a higher nobility still, when considered as an index, not of climate, but of religious principle. Its nobility is brought out by contrasting it with the architecture of the pagan civilization

preceding it and with that of the Renaissance which followed it.

The style of the ancients, he says, was marked by perfection of execution by a slave following the designs of a dominating intelligence; but the designs were of no great inventive power that would have been beyond the skill of a slave. The style of the Renaissance demanded, not only the inventive power of the middle ages, but also the perfect execution of the ancients. The one style was founded on slavery, the other on pride. Both are dependent on the characteristic social organization and religious spirit of the civilizations they served. In contrast to these, then, he explains the "savageness" and nobility of medieval architecture:

> But in the mediaeval, or especially Christian, system of ornament, this slavery is done away with altogether; Christianity having recognized, in small things as well as great, the individual value of every soul. But it not only recognizes its value; it confesses its imperfections, in only bestowing dignity upon the acknowledgment of unworthiness. That admission of lost power and fallen nature, which the Greek or Ninevite felt to be intensely painful, and, as far as might be, altogether refused, the Christian makes daily and hourly, contemplating the fact of it without fear, as tending, in the end, to God's greater glory. Therefore, to every spirit which Christianity summons to her service, her exhortation is: Do what you can, and confess frankly what you are unable to do; neither let your effort be shortened for fear of failure, nor your confession silenced for fear of shame. And it is, perhaps, the principal admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture, that they thus receive the results of the labour of inferior minds; and out of fragments full of imperfection, and betraying that imperfection in every touch, indulgently raise up a stately and unaccusable whole.[1]

[1] Works, Vol. X, pp. 189, 190.

This paragraph is, in all truth, the very innermost spark of life even of that very heart of Ruskin's thought displayed on these six pages; and it would be wrong to do other than let him draw out its implication. But this much may now be noted: The ancient slavery is destroyed; and that because Christianity recognizes the value of each soul, and because each individual, with his powers and nobility as an individual, may show himself forth. But all this is possible only by virtue of Christian humility, the Christian's readiness to confess his limitations, the imperfection, the rudeness of his work - terms which Ruskin now substitutes for "savageness." The first enlargement upon what is here in germ is this:

> . . . perfection . . . is a noble character in the abstract, but becomes ignoble when it causes us to forget the relative dignities of that nature itself, and to prefer the perfectness of the lower nature to the imperfection of the higher . . . And therefore, while in all things we see or do, we are to desire perfection, and strive for it, we are nevertheless not to set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the nobler accomplishment, above the nobler thing, in its mighty progress; not to esteem smooth minuteness above shattered majesty; not to prefer mean victory to honourable defeat . . . in our dealings with the souls of men we are to take care how we check, by severe requirement or narrow caution, efforts which might otherwise lead to a noble issue; and, still more, how we withhold our admiration from great excellencies, because they are mingled with rough faults . . . And this is what we have to do with all our labourers; to look for the thoughtful part of them, and get that out of them whatever we lose for it . . . He thinks, and ten to one, he thinks wrong . . . But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool.[1]

[1] Works, Vol. X, pp. 190 ff.

Ruskin here insists on that which may be taken as the foundation of his later economics, of his notion of "value": the thoughtful part of man, his inventive powers of imagination, which are to be sought even at the cost of imperfection, rudeness, in his work. He closes the paragraph on a thought that, as a corollary, is equally a part of his economic and social doctrine: That the alternative is to make a tool of the laborer. He continues:

> And observe, you are put to stern choice in this matter. You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them. All the energy of their spirits must be given to make cogs and compasses of themselves. All their attention and strength must go to the accomplishment of the mean act. The eye of the soul must be bent upon the fingerpoint and the soul's force must fill all the invisible nerves that guide it, ten hours a day, that it may not err from its steely precision, and so soul and sight be worn away, and the whole human being be lost at last - a heap of sawdust, so far as its intellectual work in this world is concerned . . . On the other hand, if you will make a man of the working creature, you cannot make a tool. Let him but begin to imagine, to think, to try to do anything worth doing; and the engine-turned precision is lost at once. Out come all his roughness, all his dulness, all his incapability; shame upon shame, failure upon failure, pause after pause; but out comes the whole majesty of him also . . .[1]

From these alternatives it is an easy passage to thoughts that have already begun to preoccupy Ruskin, thoughts on that thing we call Democracy:

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[1] Ibid., p. 192.

> It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves. Their universal outcry against wealth, and against nobility, is not forced from them either by the pressure of famine, or the sting of mortified pride . . . It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure . . . I know not if a day will ever come when the nature of right freedom will be understood, and when men will see that to obey another man, to labour for him, yield reverence to him or to his place, is not slavery . . . But to feel their souls withering within them, unthanked, to be counted off into a heap of mechanism numbered with its wheels, and weighed with its hammer strokes - this, nature bade not, - this God blesses not, - this, humanity for no long time is able to endure.[1]

Well! This passage will never make its way into a book of readings for American college students to stand alongside the choice encomiums of Democracy. But perhaps it should. Democracy seems to mean for too many university teachers today a perfect and unbounded freedom and to be found in Russia and under Stalin; just what is the freedom under a Five-Year-Plan would be better understood for the reading of this passage.

Here too ends that longer passage of six pages which has been called the core of Ruskin's doctrine. What follows seems equally vital, even more, at first sight, for he begins at this point to describe what is to be done as well as what is to be thought. But the practical suggestions are not nearly so valuable as the analysis which preceded them. What Ruskin thought, his analysis of the society of his and our times and of the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 193 ff.

society of the middle ages is profound and brings up a great truth. For surely it is industrialism and its machine production that has brought most of the ruin on the world today; and surely, though it may not be the whole cause, as Ruskin admits it is not, the misery of heart engendered in factories is largely responsible for that spirit of revolt nearly always found centering in industrialized areas. What then, Ruskin thinks of us is eminently true; but what Ruskin wants to do about it is another matter.

Yet something of what he now proposes reflects so much of his later thought, or rather, is so accurately the definition of that "value" he made the foundation of his economics that it must be examined. He begins:

> . . . all the evil . . . can be met only by a right understanding, on the part of all classes, what kinds of labour are good for men, raising them, and making them happy; by a determined sacrifice of such convenience or beauty, or cheapness as is to be got only by the degradation of the workman; and by equally determined demand for the products and results of healthy and ennobling labour . . .
>
> Never encourage the manufacture of anything not necessary, in the production of which invention has no share.
>
> For instance. Glass beads are utterly unnecessary, and there is no design or thought employed in their manufacture . . .
>
> But glass cups and vessels may become the subjects of exquisite invention; and if in buying these we pay for the invention, that is to say, for the beautiful form, or colour, or engraving, and not for mere finish of execution, we are doing good to humanity.[1]

Note that Ruskin's first direction concerns what is "unnecessary." For it is of the waste of energy on things unnecessary

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[1] Ibid., p. 197.

that he so continually speaks in later years; it is the false "value" that economists assign to so much that is of no use whatever to man which will rouse his indignation. This then is the "value" that Ruskin will for the rest of his life preach as the right basis of economics: what is necessary or truly useful for man's right living; what in its making exhibits the mind of the man who made it.

He now takes up the objection that would obviously be made by the modern economist and industrialist, an objection based on the principle of the division of labor. He says:

> All ideas of this kind are founded upon two mistaken suppositions: the first, that one man's thoughts can be, or ought to be, executed by another man's hands; the second, that manual labour is a degradation, when it is governed by intellect.
>
> On a large scale, and in work determinable by line and rule, it is indeed both possible and necessary that the thoughts of one man should be carried out by the labor of others; in this sense I have already defined the best architecture to be the expression of the mind of manhood by the hands of childhood. But on a smaller scale, and in a design which cannot be mathematically defined, one man's thoughts can never be expressed by another; and the difference between the spirit of touch of the man who is inventing, and of the man who is obeying directions, is often all the difference between a great and a common work of art . . . in these days . . . we want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working . . . Now it is only by labour that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity.[1]

Ruskin closes his discussion of the "savageness," or rudeness

[1] Ibid., pp. 200, 201.

or imperfection of Gothic architecture with the final assertion that "the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art," and this for two reasons:

> . . . first, that no great man ever stops working till he has reached his point of failure . . . his mind is always far in advance of his powers of execution . . . besides that he will always give to the inferior portions of his work only such inferior attention as they require.

Moreover:

> The second reason is, that imperfection is in some sort essential to all we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change. Nothing that lives is, or can be, rigidly perfect; part of it is decaying, part nascent . . . No human face is exactly the same in its lines on each side, no leaf perfect in its lobes, no branch in its symmetry. All admit irregularity as they imply change. All things are literally better, lovelier, and more beloved for the imperfections which have been divinely appointed, that the law of human life may be Effort, and the law of human judgment Mercy.[1]

Perhaps one will be accused of weakly bowing before the blast of Ruskin's great eloquence, of submitting without sufficient sense of the realities to a far-fetched rather than a profound analysis, if he says that in these great pages he finds the deepest insight into the causes of our age's woes, excepting, indeed, the insight and wisdom of Christ's Vicar speaking by virtue of his office. But when Ruskin finds at the bottom of social and industrial organization the same vice in the evil organization and same virtue in the good that Christianity achieved in another age; when Ruskin finds humility at the root of the greatness of

[1] Ibid., pp. 203, 204.

medieval architecture and the medieval social system and finds pride and slavery in ours- surely when his findings are those of the Vicar of Christ, it is excusable for the reader to be carried away willingly by his great argument. And if he be a Catholic teacher of literature he will be well justified if he takes these thoughts of Ruskin as a contribution to Catholic culture.

While this is not the time to summarize all the work that Ruskin did, at least it is worth noting now how fundamental is this teaching of his that in humility we are to learn what is the right kind of labor for men to do, and that on the notion of "value" thus derived we are to build our economics and sociology. We may see how this humility is a first condition of all Ruskin's thought: how when he speaks of the spirit of Sacrifice, this humility is supposed, not only in the formal acknowledgement of God's dominion but in showing it by giving the best we have, however poor that may be; again how the spirit of Truth makes no pretenses to cover its poverty because it is humble enough to get along without shams; how the spirit of Obedience in an architect is first of all humble, so that he does not insist on displaying his own imagined originality, but submits to the teaching of tradition.

This is also the place again to draw attention to the comment, implicit in these pages of Ruskin, on that Individualism which has so much taken the admiration of men. It was accepted and it dominated the thinking, religious, political, economic, and artistic, of the world in what is therefore called a new age,

"Modern times." That its excesses have recently been rejected in a good part of the world is only to say that the totalitarian concept of society has gone to an opposite extreme. But a right individualism was achieved in that society which Ruskin has been describing and by the very principles he has been emphasizing. The society of the middle ages was not built on slavery, either in its feudal institutions, or its ecclesiastical, or in the life of its townsmen and craftsmen. Rather, as Ruskin says, "Christianity recognized the value of every soul," and at the same time humbly recognized the limitations of that soul. The Christian, then, rejoiced in the greatness that was his by divine adoption, rejoiced in the liberty God gave him to return it freely in His service, rejoiced in his equality before God and in the reception of the Sacraments with every other man. But he humbly admitted that it was not for him to make up his own religion, to interpret for himself the Scriptures. Under the supreme guidance of such a Faith, he knew his place in the social system, the feudal system, a man with rights and with duties as well.

And in the medieval artist too this right Individualism asserted itself. What was personal, individual, in him and in his creative powers, was given freedom of expression. But that freedom, he acknowledged in his humility, was not an end in itself; he would never have defined art or literature as the "expression of the artist's personality"; he would never have offered to the world his "stream of consciousness" simply because it was <u>his</u>; he would not publish every aberration of his imagination because it

was so original. No, art was not to him the expression of his interesting personality, but was an effort to convey, in a particular medium, Truth and Beauty. And because it was a communication, and because it was truth, and because he had his limitations in doing the one and seeing the other, he was humble enough to submit himself to the teaching of others and the tradition of the men with whom he lived. And the communication of Truth in Beauty thus made to his fellows on the walls of every parish church and cathedral and even in his home was, he was simple enough to believe, a pleasing offering to God.

In this Catholic Individualism is the epitome of Ruskin's thought as it developed in his study of architecture.

CHAPTER V

DEVELOPMENT INTO SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

To one whose introduction to Ruskin, and his first enthusiasm, was the Stones of Venice and to whom Ruskin's architectural teaching has always been an illumination of the work he saw about him, whether of the eclectics or the functionalists, Ruskin the sociologist has always been a little disconcerting. It has been hard to admit the failings of the genius of the architectural writings who in architecture found so surely the solid principles of Catholic social life; hard to admit that the later lectures on social reconstruction did not live up to the great beginnings and really bored him with their diffuseness, repetitions, and impracticability.

But much of this weakness can be explained by the form Ruskin's later work took: Lectures and letters. Small audiences, and many of them, called for the repetition of his teaching; and any kind of audience requires the diffuseness, the thin spreading of thought, which can only be absorbed a little at a time. And anyone who will write so much must repeat himself.

But so it is that the last of Ruskin's really concentrated thought - it was first written for the Cornhill Magazine and not for the lecture platform - is Unto this Last. It is therefore

the last of his works that can be used for reading and study with a class, though there is no record of any compiler of readings having ever used it, at least in any of those collections now current. For this reason, in part, it is chosen now for study.

But there is a very much better reason for examining it now. Though there is scarcely a word in it about the Artist and his place in Society, and it is as exclusively a work on economics as Ruskin could write, still it represents in a definite form those social ideas that were rooted in Ruskin's first criticism of art and grew through those studies in architecture just now reviewed-those ideas that by the year 1860 had grown into a consistent view of the social system. Whether at this time Ruskin viewed his social system primarily as a condition under which, and only under which, great architecture, painting, and sculpture was possible; or whether his sympathy was now in the main in the amelioration of society for its own sake, is rather hard to say. Certainly a reading of his later work inclines one to think that his was the latter attitude of mind. But the unique thing about Ruskin is that his sociology grew so oddly out of art criticism, and that the latter is never very far in the background.

1.

The Transition from Art to Economics and Sociology

Since it is this transition from Art to Economics and the relations between them that first prompted this study, it is now,

then, time to trace this connection more accurately than has so far been done. The history of the matter as it developed in Ruskin's mind provides an arrangement for studying the relations between Art and Economics that is logical as well as biographical, and may therefore be conveniently followed.

A first stage may be marked as extending from Ruskin's boyhood on through the early years of his writing. We may call it simply a time of observation. It is well described by F. W. Roe[1] as the time of his travels with his father and the meetings with the latter's business associates in England and on the continent; of his shocked perception their callousness toward the impoverished peasants from whose wine these merchants made such fine profits and on whose poverty they lived so grandly in Paris and London. These too were the years when the horrors of the Industrial Revolution were working toward their climax and when men were beginning to perceive them. Carlyle was already protesting; Cobbett had written of their ultimate cause - the Protestant despoliation of the poor in the sixteenth century, a history which Ruskin himself later recommended as the only true one. Chartist agitation and "Christian Socialism" under Maurice and Kingsley would come to a head in the very years of Ruskin's own turning to the same problems. Dickens was doing his work to the same end. And men's minds had been turned back to the earlier, the middle age, even before Cobbett. Gothic romances and the Oxford-movement

[1] Op. cit., pp. 136-138.

do not seem to play much part in Ruskin's sociology, but they were "in the air," and the older civilization was preoccupying men's minds. All this is both biography of Ruskin and the history of his age, but the ideas they were turning over are a necessary part of our thought today as well as of Ruskin's.

Troubled by all he saw and read, Ruskin did not yet see the full connection that these matters would have with the work he had elected to do. He had first fallen to with enthusiasm to defend the art of Turner; then in the second volume of Modern Painters to an exposition of his own critical principles. It was in doing this last that he took the logical step, the first one, that led him on from Art to Economics and Sociology. As has been described he laid down three fundamentals of his Aesthetics: that Creation was for the glory of God; that that glory is given by men when they delight in His creation and praise Him; that in seeing reflected in Creation His attributes and mode of being, they learn what their own life should be. The last opened up, or laid the foundation for, all in Ruskin that we would call his sociology. It exhibits basic relations between Art and Economics, at least as Ruskin understood the matters, though the immediate inferences and application to the abuses in the world around him are not yet apparent.

A third stage, or point, in the history of this transition came when Ruskin, acclaimed as an art critic, entered upon a sort of apostolate of his doctrine - for, if Art was for the service of God, it must be preached to all men, and not to the reviewers

of books and fellow-critics. But the apostolate failed, and with the years Ruskin came to realize more and more another relation of Art and Economics: Art and its worship of God was impossible for a people as degraded in soul as were the poor of England in those days of triumphant industrialism. Before he could talk Art to them, he must cure them of their economic distress.

During these same years, but through other experiences, Ruskin was coming to discover another point at which Art and Economics touched. He had begun his studies in architecture from which came the Seven Lamps and the Stones of Venice. In his analysis of the great works of the middle ages he was discovering qualities that reflected the religious and social ways of their builders. It was not an original discovery so much as a realization of truths for himself. But the realization that the power shown in the architectural work of the earlier epoch, a power peculiar to that age, was the result of that beautiful balance of freedom and submission to authority, of that exercise by the ordinary workman of all his human powers, of his true manhood, that distinguished the social life of the age, drove Ruskin to seek to restore all that life in his own day.

So came the transition, never absolute, but rather one of emphasis, from the writings on Art to those on Sociology.

Wilenski, of course, must see the matter differently:

> We now reach 1858 and 1859 when he realized that his bid for Art-Dictatorship had failed; and when he ascribed the fault to the obstinate stupidity of the architects and artists who had not done as he bade

them.[1]

And again:

> To understand these lectures - A Joy For Ever - we must visualize Ruskin established at Denmark Hill . . . a troop of servants, each with his appointed station, and all obedient to the appointed government of the best and most serviceable people in the home . . . There was no competition . . .[2]

Such is the interpretation of literature in the light of biography. Even if it were true, of what use is it in estimating the ideas, the work itself? And is such gossip important enough to nullify the author's most direct statements of his motives? Let Wilenski's stand beside Ruskin's own explanation of the change:

> . . . I feel the force of mechanism and fury of avaricious commerce to be at present so irrestible, that I have seceded from the study, not only of architecture, but nearly of all art; and have given myself, as I would in a besieged city, to seek the best modes of getting bread and water for its multitudes . . . As the evil spirits of avarice and luxury are directly contrary to art, so, also, art is directly contrary to them.

Such words, uttered in The Study of Architecture, in 1865, have too much reason in them to be put aside as the delusion of a manic depressive.

This transition of Ruskin's thinking from Art to Economics is, of course, viewed with alarm by other critics, and for the reasons that might be expected. Amabel Williams-Ellis cannot but complain of "morality" touching economics:

> But unfortunately Ruskin too often in his economic

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[1] Op. cit., p. 284.

[2] Ibid., p. 280.

> writing . . . is apt to drag in morality and aesthetics . . . He is apt to go on to defend . . . not what people do in fact want and desire, but what they ought . . . This sort of argument is fundamental in Ruskin. His mother's moral concepts lay deep and heavy on his heart . . . sooner or later a bubble from this thick dark morality rises to the surface.

Indeed, Ruskin had introduced morality into Economics as he had introduced it into Art - the morality of the Mystical Body of Christ, in part announced by the words of Christ from which Ruskin drew the title of his book: "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethern, you did it to me." (Matthew, xxv, 40.) Ruskin, who for all his confession of disbelief, was too much the "anima naturaliter Christiana" ever to doubt in the depths of his heart that man was created to serve and glorify God in a common love for God and a mutual love of his fellow man and a co-operation with him, heartily hated the accepted economic doctrine of his day that the greatest good of the greatest number would come from the enlightened self-interest of every individual, from their self-interested opposition and competition. This confessed opposition of every man to his every fellow had as its correlative the doctrine of buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest at whatever injury to other men, and for its necessary condition of operation the third doctrine that man must be free - and what a freedom! - thus to cut his neighbors' throats; more specifically, free in the pursuit of his business from all interference from the government and any of its hampering regulations. Against these three doctrines, which were almost as one, Ruskin threw all his power.

His argument should still be of interest to us, for it is still needed. The optimists are singularly blind who say that Ruskin's argument is useless today because his giants have all been slaughtered these forty years.

2.

"The Roots of Honour"

"Among the delusions which at different periods have possessed themselves of the minds of large masses of the human race, perhaps the most curious . . . is . . . that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection,"[1] are the words with which Ruskin opens his attack in "The Roots of Honour." He continues:

> Disputant after disputant vainly strives to show that the interests of the masters are, or are not, antagnostic to those of the men: none of the pleaders ever seeming to remember that it does not absolutely or always follow that the persons must be antagonistic because their interests are. If there is only a crust of bread in the house, and mother and children are starving, their interests are not the same . . . Yet it does not necessarily follow that there will be "antagonism" between them, that they will fight for the crust, and the mother, being the strongest, will get it . . .
>
> . . . all endeavour to deduce rules of action from balance of expediency is in vain. And it is meant to be in vain. For no human actions were ever intended by the Maker of men to be guided by balances of expediency, but by balances of justice.
>
> I have said balances of justice, meaning, in the term justice, to include affection, - such affection as one man <u>owes</u> to another. All right relations between master and operative, and all their best interest ultimately depend on this.[2]

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[1] <u>Works</u>, Vol. XVII, p. 25.

[2] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 27, 28.

Arguing that in any case the "largest quantity of work will not be done . . . for pay . . ." but only "when the motive force, that is to say, the will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel: namely, by the affections,"[1] Ruskin reminds the reader at once of that passage in the "Nature of Gothic" in which he contrasts the factory wage-slave with the freely inventive, and therefore happy, craftsmen in the middle ages, and of the consequences in the relation between master and man: servile fear in the one; reverence and loyalty in the other. It is to this same purpose that Ruskin is now pushing his argument:

> Passing . . . to the more complicated relations existing between a manufacturer and his workmen, we are met first by certain curious difficulties, resulting, apparently, from a harder and colder state of moral elements. It is easy to imagine an enthusiastic affection existing among soldiers for the colonel. Not so easy to imagine an enthusiastic affection among cotton-spinners for the proprietor of the mill . . . Not only are we met by this apparent anomaly, in moral matters, but by others connected with it, in administrative system. For a servant or a soldier is engaged at a definite rate of wages, for a definite period; but a workman at a rate of wages variable according to the demand for labour, and with the risk of being at any time thrown out of his situation by chances of trade. Now, as, under these contingencies, no action of the affections can take place, but only an explosive action of dis-affections, two points offer themselves for consideration in the matter.
>
> The first - How far the rate of wages may be so regulated as not to vary with the demand for labour.
>
> The second - How far it is possible that bodies of workmen may be engaged and maintained at such fixed rate of wages (whatever the state of trade may be,) without enlarging or diminishing their number, so as to give them permanent interest in the establishment with which they are connected, like that of the domestic

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[1] Ibid., p. 29.

> servants in an old family, or an esprit de corps, like that of the soldiers in a crack regiment.[1]

It is well worth noting here, not the proposition of a fixed wage, but the reason for it. We are inclined to look upon it simply as an assurance of sufficiency of the supplies of life. Ruskin, characteristically, thought of it as assuring loyalty, a certain devotion to and interest in the work to be done and in his master. To Ruskin, this came first; and then all other good things would follow. The proposition was aimed at the fundamental error of his contemporary economists, the principle of antagonism between master and man, of the class war, of competition even for work, in which the laboring man had to sell his labour, not for just price, but for whatever he could get.

To the objection against a fixed wage, Ruskin simply replies that we have a fixed price for the most important work that is being done, that there is a fixed fee for lawyer, doctor, clergyman, soldier, and that the

> . . . natural and right system respecting all labour is, that it should be paid at a fixed rate, but the good workman employed and the bad workman unemployed. The false, unnatural, and destructive system is when the bad workman is allowed to offer his work at half-price, and either take the place of the good, or force him by his competition to work for an inadequate sum.[2]

Having attacked this economic doctrine of opposition and competition, by showing how a spirit of loyalty might be rendered possible in the men, Ruskin proceeds to argue for a corresponding

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[1] Ibid., pp. 32, 33.

[2] Ibid., p. 34.

loyalty in the master to his men. As the soldier, the priest, the physician all have a sense of their responsibility to the men who entrust their various welfare to them, and are ready to sacrifice themselves in the performance of their duties, and are honored in their offices for that reason, so the man of commerce, or the industrialist, is held by the world in some contempt, or at least is looked upon with suspicion, because he considers only his "enlightened" self-interest, because he cozens rather than serves his fellow. Were the merchant, or the industrialist, to consider that he too has a high duty to man, to supply man's needs of food, clothing, housing, and were he ready to sacrifice himself to perform his duty rightly, he too would stand in honor. His would be a double responsibility: to the public whom he supplies, and to the men whom he directs:

> And as into these functions, requiring for their right exercise the highest intelligence, as well as patience, kindness, and tact, the merchant is bound to put all his energy, so for their just discharge he is bound, as soldier or physician is bound, to give up, if need be, his life, in such way as it may be demanded of him. Two main points he has in his providing function to maintain: first, his engagements (faithfulness to engagements being the real root of all possibilities, in commerce); and secondly, the perfectness and purity of the thing provided; so that, rather than fail in any engagement, or consent to any deterioration, adulteration, or unjust and exorbitant price of that which he provides, he is bound to meet fearlessly any form of distress, poverty, or labour, which may, through maintenance of these points, come upon him.
>
> Again: in his office as governor of the men employed by him, the merchant or manufacturer is invested with a distinctly paternal authority and responsibility . . . the only means which the master has of doing justice to the men employed by him is to ask himself sternly whether he is dealing with such subordinates as

he would with his own son . . .[1]

Such is the argument of the "Roots of Honour." At the very beginning of his efforts to formulate an economic system and a plan for social reconstruction, Ruskin goes to what he considers the root of all the evils he saw around him. The system in power, he saw, had no root in anything sound; its root was in the selfishness of men, and what grew out of it was the system of competition, of buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market, while the political organization stood aside or even encouraged the process. Ruskin would substitute, and he refused to believe that it was impossible to substitute, a system rooted in Christian charity, out of which would appear a life - Christian life - in which men would co-operate with one another, In this system the laborer would learn loyalty to his master, and in that loyalty could live as a Christian should - happily; and his master would accept his responsibility to the people whom he supplied with their daily needs and to the workman under his direction; both would have their roots of life in Honour - in Charity.

To see how much truth there was in this teaching of Ruskin we have only to compare it with the official teaching of the Church, announced in the Encyclical Rerum Novarum of Pope Leo XIII and the Quadragesimo Anno of Pope Pius XI. From the former these passages are particularly pat:

> The great mistake that is made in the matter now under consideration is to possess oneself of the idea

[1] Works, Vol. XVII, pp. 41, 42.

> that class is naturally hostile to class; that rich and poor are intended by nature to live at war with one another. So irrational and so false is this view, that the exact contrary is the truth. Just as the symmetry of the human body is the result of the disposition of the members of the body, so in a State it is ordained by nature that these two classes should exist in harmony and agreement, and should, as it were, fit with one another, so as to maintain the equilibrium of the body politic. Each requires the other; Capital cannot do without Labor, nor Labor without Capital. Mutual agreement results in pleasantness, and good order; perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and outrage. Now in preventing such strife as this, and in making it impossible, the efficacy of Christianity is marvellous and manifold . . .
>
> Religion teaches the rich man and the employer that their work people are not their slaves; that they must respect in every man his dignity as a man and as a Christian . . .
>
> But if Christian precepts prevail, the two classes will not only be united in the bonds of friendship, but also those of brotherly love. For they will understand and feel that all men are the children of the common father, that is God; that all have the same end, which is God himself . . . that all and each are redeemed by Jesus Christ, and raised to the dignity of children of God, and are thus united in brotherly ties both with each other and with Jesus Christ.[1]

Of that competition in the labor market which Ruskin denounces, Pius has this to say:

> Labor . . . is not a mere chattel, since the human dignity of the workingman must be recognized in it, and consequently cannot be bought and sold like any piece of merchandise. None the less the demand and supply of labor divides men on the labor market into two classes, as into two camps, and the bargaining between these parties transforms this labor market into an arena where the two armies are engaged in combat . . .
>
> . . . How completely deceived are those inconsiderate reformers who, zealous only for commutative justice, proudly disdain the help of charity! Clearly charity cannot take the place of justice unfairly withheld. . .

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[1] Rerum Novarum, Sections 15 and 21 (as edited by Joseph Husslein, S. J., in The Christian Social Manifesto.)

> For, justice alone, even though most faithfully observed, can remove indeed the cause of social strife, but can never bring about a union of hearts and minds. Yet this union, binding men together, is the main principle of stability.in all institutions . . . Working men too will lay aside all feelings of hatred or envy . . . will cease to feel weary of the position assigned them by Divine Providence in human society; they will become proud of it . . . following the footsteps of Him . . . who chose to become a carpenter among men . . .[1]

Surely then, Ruskin was right, when, thirty years before the Rerum Novarum, he attacked, in the face of all the world, the doctrine that competition for the goods of life and hatred of class for class was the basis of society.

3.

"Qui Judicatis Terram"

To reduce all the teaching of Ruskin to a few and fundamental principles would be a piece of work, indeed admirable, but requiring time and a power of analysis, perhaps, not available here. It was a work he never did for himself, and it may well be quite beyond the powers of students of him who are lesser men. Nor is such a reduction to a few principles and the exposition of Ruskin's consistency in them, the proper aim of this study. Therefore it is not unreasonable to put forward what from general impression rather than from scientific analysis are guiding principles and to study them in part as a system, but chiefly for their intrinsic and individual worth.

So it is that, if the thought of "Quid Judicatis Terram" is

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[1] Quadragesimo Anno, Sections 29 and 46b.

not in fact one of Ruskin's fundamentals, at least it is worth attention. It is at once in important opposition to so much of the thought and practice of his day and ours, and at the same time so close to the traditional Catholic ethics and the teachings of the Encyclicals. Against the competitive system, the buy-in-the-cheapest-and-sell-in-the-dearest-market system, with its absolution from all interference of government, Ruskin asserts in this essay that prices are not thus to be determined, but by justice enforced by the regulation of authority.

The preceding essay in Unto this Last, "The Veins of Wealth," is really an introduction to the principle just enunciated. In "The Veins of Wealth" he argues that inequalities of wealth are not in themselves right or wrong, that they suppose neither a healthy society nor a sickly one. They are right or wrong accordingly as they have come about justly or unjustly:

> The whole question, therefore, respecting not only the advantage, but even the quantity, of national wealth, resolves itself finally into one of abstract justice. It is impossible to conclude, of any given mass of acquired wealth, merely by the fact of its existence, whether it signifies good or evil to the nation in the midst of which it exists. Its real value depends on the moral sign attached to it, just as sternly as that of a mathematical quantity depends on the algebraical sign attached to it. Any given accumulation of commercial wealth may be indicative, on the one hand, of faithful industries, progressive energies, and productive ingenuities; or, on the other, it may be indicative of mortal luxuries, merciless tyranny, ruinous chicane . . . One mass of money is the outcome of action which has created, - another, of action which has annihilated, - ten times as much in the gathering of it . . . That which seems to be wealth may in verity be only the gilded index of far-reaching ruin; a wrecker's handful of coin gleaned from the beach to

which he beguiled an argosy . . .[1]

Ruskin's first blow for Justice is aimed against that necessary condition of the competitive system, the "freedom" to be given the competitors to do their worst, each to the other, and it is rather hard to say that this is not the main point of the whole essay, as certainly this "paternalism" he urges, at least as its enemies call it, is one of the great principles of his social system. The argument rises from analogy:

> I have just spoken of the flowing of streams to the sea as a partial image of the action of wealth. In one respect it is not a partial, but a perfect image. The popular economist thinks himself wise in having discovered that wealth, or the forms of property in general, must go where they are required; that where demand is, supply must follow. He farther declares that this course of demand and supply cannot be forbidden by human laws. Precisely in the same sense, and with the same certainty, the waters of the world go where they are required . . . Whether the stream shall be a curse or a blessing, depends upon man's labour, and administering intelligence. For centuries after centuries, great districts of the world, rich in soil, and favored in climate, have lain desert under the rage of their own rivers; not only desert, but plague-stricken. The stream which rightly directed, would have flowed in soft irrigation from field to field . . . now overwhelms the plain and poisons the wind . . . In like manner this wealth "goes where it is required." No human laws can withstand its flow. They can only guide it: but this, the leading trench and limiting mound can do so thoroughly, that it shall become water of life. . .
>
> The necessity of these laws of distribution or restraint is curiously overlooked in the ordinary political economist's definition of his own "science" . . . to grow rich "scientifically" we must grow rich justly; and therefore, know what is just; so that our economy will no longer depend merely on prudence, but on jurisprudence - and that of divine, not human law. . .

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[1] Works, Vol. XVII, pp. 52, 53.

"DILIGITE JUSTITIAM QUI JUDICATIS TERRAM."[1]

They who rule the world and judge it are not to do so by standing aside and letting the stream of industry and commerce go as it pleases; they are to love justice and see that it is done. And in particular this justice is to be done the labouring man; the price of his labour is not to be settled in a "free market," but by what is due him in justice:

> The abstract idea, then of just or due wages, as respects the labourer, is that they will consist in a sum of money which will at any time procure for him at least as much labour as he has given, rather more than less. And this equity or justice of payment is, observe, wholly independent of any reference to the number of men who are willing to do the work. I want a horseshoe for my horse. Twenty smiths, or twenty thousand smiths, may be ready to forge it; their number does not in one atom's weight affect the question of the equitable payment of the one who does forge it. It costs him a quarter of an hour of his life, and so much skill and strength of arm, to make that horseshoe for me. Then at some future time I am bound in equity to give a quarter of an hour . . . and also as much strength of arm and skill . . .[2]

The practical working of the competition for jobs and the injustice involved is briefly and clearly given:

> Supposing, then, the just wages of any quantity of given labour to have been ascertained, let us examine the first results of just and unjust payment, when in favour of the purchaser or employer: i.e. when two men are ready to do the work, and only one wants to have it done.
>
> The unjust purchaser forces the two to bid against each other till he has reduced their demand to its lowest terms. Let us assume that the lowest bidder offers to do the work at half the just price.
>
> The purchaser employs him, and does not employ the other. The first or apparent result is, therefore, that

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[1] Ibid., pp. 60, 61, 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 66.

> one of the two men is left out of employ, or to starvation, just as definitely as by the just procedure of giving fair price to the best workman. The various writers who endeavoured to invalidate the positions of my first paper never saw this, and assumed that the unjust hirer employed both. He employs both no more than the just hirer. The only difference (in the outset) is that the just man pays sufficiently, the unjust man insufficiently, for the labour of the single person employed.
>
> I say, "in the outset"; for this first or apparent difference is not the actual difference. By the unjust procedure, half the proper price of the work is left in the hands of the employer. This enables him to hire another man at the same unjust rate, on some other kind of work; and the final result is that he has two men working for him at half-price, and two are out of employ.[1]

But Ruskin's analysis of what happens when a just wage is paid is more difficult, and the result discovered of far greater and wider significance. It might be said to have implied in it the whole system of Belloc and Chesterton and the Distributists. At least here is a first cause of such a state of distributed wealth which they envision:

> By the just procedure, the whole price of the first piece of work goes into the hands of the man who does it. No surplus being left in the employer's hands, he cannot hire another man for another piece of labour. But by precisely so much as his power is diminished, the hired workman's power is increased: that is to say, by the additional half of the price he has received; which additional half he has the power of using to employ another man in his service . . . The difference between the just and unjust procedure does not lie in the number of men hired, but in the price paid to them and the persons by whom it is paid. The essential difference, that which I want the reader to see clearly, is, that in the unjust case, two men work for one, the first hirer. In the just case, one man works for the first hirer, one for the person hired, and so on, down or up through the

[1] Ibid., pp. 68, 69.

> various grades of service; the influence being carried forward by justice, and arrested by injustice. The universal and constant action of justice in this matter is therefore to diminish the power of wealth in the hands of one individual over the masses of men, and to distribute it through a chain of men.[1]

This is not all. There are further results, and the extent of them can be easily discerned from Ruskin's very next paragraph:

> The immediate operation of justice in this respect is therefore to diminish the power of wealth, first in the acquisition of luxury, and secondly, in exercise of moral influence. The employer cannot concentrate so multitudinous labour on his own interest, nor can he subdue so multitudinous mind to his own will. But the secondary operation of justice is not less important . . . the sufficient or just payment, distributed through a descending series of offices or grades of labour, gives each subordinate person fair and sufficient means of rising in the social scale, if he chooses to use them; and thus not only diminishes the immediate power of wealth, but removes the worst disabilities of poverty.[2]

These matters lead Ruskin at the end of the essay to take up the suggestion that he was a socialist, as indeed was said of him as it has been said of any man who has proposed to prevent the unjust accumulation of great wealth:

> . . . Whatever their conclusion may be I think it necessary to answer for myself only this: that if there be any one point insisted on throughout my works more frequently than another, that one point is the impossibility of Equality. My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others; and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons or person to guide, to lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue their inferiors according to their own better knowledge and

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[1] Ibid., p. 69.

[2] Ibid., p. 70.

> wiser will. My principles of Political Economy were all involved . . . in a single sentence in the last volume of Modern Painters - "Government and co-operation are in all things the Laws of Life; Anarchy and competition the Laws of Death."
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> And with respect to the mode in which these general principles affect the secure possession of property, so far am I from invalidating such security, that the whole gist of these papers will be found ultimately to aim at an extension in its range; and whereas it has long been known and declared that the poor have no right to the property of the rich, I wish it also to be known and declared that the rich have no right to the property of the poor.[1]

The reply is not so important as a defense against the charge of Socialism, of which Ruskin could easily clear himself, but it is significant for its iteration, which seals their importance in his system, of two ideas: that the competitive system is to be replaced by a co-operation among men under the direction of authority - "paternalism" it would have been called not long ago, but today "fascism" with too uncritical a comprehension of what Ruskin meant, a Christian submission of lesser to higher powers; and, secondly, that the vast accumulations of wealth are to be distributed, not by taking all property from all men, but by the wider possession of smaller properties to be effected by the logical operation of just prices in place of competition.

Ruskin closes the essay with a statement, of moment to Christian readers, and almost identical with one of Newman's, on the controlling influence that the study of Theology and the practice of what it teaches should have on all other studies and,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 74, 75.

in particular, Political Economy, and of the grossest errors and inconsistencies that arise when it has no such controlling influence:

> . . . nothing in history has ever been so disgraceful to human intellect as the acceptance among us of the common doctrines of political economy as a science . . . I know no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion. The writings which we (verbally) esteem as divine, not only denounce the love of money as the source of all evil, and as an idolatry abhorred of the Deity, but declare mammon service to be the accurate and irreconcileable opposite of God's service; and, whenever they speak of riches absolute, and poverty absolute, declare woe to the rich, and blessing to the poor. Whereupon we forthwith investigate a science of becoming rich, as the shortest road to national prosperity.[1]

The sum of Ruskin's argument in this essay may be stated thus: The working man must be given a <u>just</u> wage as a condition of peace as well as for justice itself; that a just wage is impossible in a competitive market for labour; the State must intervene in this competition to see that justice is done. We may see how this argument is confirmed by the papal encyclicals:

> . . . Just as the unity of human society cannot be built upon class warfare, so the proper ordering of economic affairs cannot be left to free competition alone. From this source have proceeded in the past all the errors of the "individualistic" school. This school, ignorant or forgetful of the social and moral aspect of economic matters, teaches that the State should refrain in theory and practice from interfering therein, because these possess in free competition and open markets a principle of self-direction better able to control them than any created intellect. Free competition, however, though within certain limits just and productive of good results, cannot be the ruling principle of the economic world; this has been abundantly proved

[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 75, 76.

> by the consequences that have followed from the free rein given to these dangerous Individualistic ideals. It is therefore very necessary that economic affairs be once more subjected to and governed by a true and effective guiding principle. Still less can this function be exercised by the economic supremacy which within recent times has taken the place of free competition; for this is a headstrong and vehement power, which, if it is to prove beneficial to mankind, needs to be curbed strongly and ruled with prudence. It cannot, however, be curbed and governed by itself. More lofty and noble principles must therefore be sought in order to control this supremacy sternly and uncompromisingly: to wit, social justice and social charity . . . to that end . . . this justice . . . must build up a juridical and social order able to pervade all economic activity . . .[1]

That the laissez-faire economics resulted in injustice is clearly insisted on in this passage, and that injustice must be curbed by state regulation; moreover that the system formally accepted injustice as a necessary and unavoidable condition of economic life is noted in the following:

> Capital, however, was long able to appropriate to itself excessive advantages; it claimed all the products and profits, and left to the laborer the barest minimum necessary to repair his strength and to insure the continuation of his class. For by inexorable economic law it was held, all accumulations of riches must fall to the share of the wealthy, while the workingman must remain perpetually in indigence or reduced to the minimum needed for existence. It is true that the actual state of things was not always and everywhere as deplorable as the liberalistic tenets of the so-called Manchester school might lead us to conclude; but it cannot be denied that a steady drift of economic and social tendencies was in this direction . . .[2]

Pope Leo in his earlier encyclical had insisted on the same need of regulation of economic life by the State to insure justice

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[1] Quadragesimo Anno, Section 30.

[2] Ibid., Section 21.

to the workman:

> The first duty, therefore, of the rulers of the State should be to make sure that the laws and institutions, the general character and administration of the commonwealth, shall be such as to produce of themselves public well-being and private prosperity. This is the proper office of wise statesmanship and the work of the heads of the State . . .
> . . . Justice, therefore, demands that the interests of the poorer population be carefully watched over by the administration, so that they who contribute so largely to the advantage of the community may themselves share in the benefits they create . . .[1]

That the Popes did not envision a bureaucracy to govern the economic life of a people is shown quite clearly in the Quadragesimo Anno in which Pius XI develops the idea of corporations akin to the guilds of the middle ages for governing the various branches of economic life. That this proposal in a large measure corresponds to Ruskin's proposals to revive guild life might be made the subject of a lengthy discussion at this point. But it seems better in this study to limit the matter to the most fundamental notions of Ruskin; they indeed call for all the attention it is practical here to give.

4.

"Ad Valorem"

At the end of the essay, "The Veins of Wealth," the third in Unto this Last, Ruskin wrote:

> . . . it may even appear, after some consideration . . that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures. Our

[1] Rerum Novarum, Sections 26, 27, and 29.

> modern wealth, I think, has rather a tendency the other way; - most political economists appearing to consider multitudes of human creatures not conducive to wealth, or at best conducive to it only by remaining in a dim-eyed and narrow-chested state of being.[1]

This question of value, of what true wealth consisted in, was one of Ruskin's great preoccupations. It seems to have antedated in his mind his criticism of the competitive system, and is the thought which more than any other forced the transition from art-critic to economist. So it appears, as has already been noted, in The Stones of Venice. Now again he develops it as the fourth of those essays on fundamentals in Unto this Last, "Ad Valorem." There is this difficulty in recommending it for reading: it is not a well-organized piece of thought. Yet, as the nucleus of some of Ruskin's noblest writing, as principle stated to which he returns again and again in later work as his earlier work leads to this, the essay is worth some study.

The matter of Ruskin's disagreement with his contemporary economists is in the passage quoted from "The Veins of Wealth." Wealth, that on which they put "value," was to these economists something quite different from the happiness and well-being of the people; there might be great "wealth" in the nation but the people might be miserable. For wealth to them, that which had value, was what could be sold on the open market. Ruskin explains:

> In his chapter on Capital, Mr. J. S. Mill instances, as a capitalist, a hardware manufacturer, who,

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[1] Works, Vol. XVII, pp. 55, 56.

> having intended to spend a certain portion of the proceeds of his business in buying plate and jewels, changes his mind, and "pays it as wages to additional workpeople." The effect is stated by Mr. Mill to be, that "more food is appropriated to the consumption of productive labor" . . . I very seriously inquire why ironware is produce, and silverware is not? That the merchant consumes the one, and sells the other, certainly does not constitute the difference, unless it can be shown (which indeed, I perceive it to be becoming daily more and more the aim of tradesmen to show) that commodities are made to be sold, and not to be consumed.[1]

That ". . . commodities are made to be sold, and not to be consumed" is the view he attacks for its fatal consequence. And he adds:

> . . . a steel fork might appear a more substantial production than a silver one; we may grant also that knives, no less than forks, are good produce; and scythes and ploughshares serviceable articles. But, how of bayonets? Supposing the hardware merchant to effect large sales of these by help of the "setting free" of the food of his servants and his silversmiths,- is he still employing productive labourers, or, in Mr. Mill's words, labourers who increase "the stock of permanent means of enjoyment"? Or if, instead of bayonets, he supply bombs . . .[2]

Well, bayonets and bombs are eminently saleable articles in this world; and gardens, the produce of his servants, and highly wrought silver cannot be sold at all or at only a fraction of their first price. Therefore it is productive of "wealth" to devote your capital to the making of armament. Similar is Ruskin's criticism of the common notion of Capital: that it is not productive of happiness in the lives of people but primarily issues

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[1] Ibid., pp. 77, 78.

[2] Ibid., p. 79.

in interest and more capital. Like production of goods simply to sell them, its only end is more money. He says:

> Capital signifies "head, or source, or root material"- it is material by which some derivative or secondary good is produced. It is only capital proper . . . when it is thus producing something different from itself. It is a root, which does not enter into vital function till it produces something else than a root: namely, fruit. That fruit will in time again produce roots; and so all living capital issues in reproduction of capital; but capital which produces nothing but capital is only root producing root . . .
>
> The best and simplest general type of capital is a well-made ploughshare. Now if that ploughshare did nothing but beget other ploughshares . . . it would have lost its function of capital . . . And the true home question, to every capitalist and to every nation, is not, "how many ploughs have you"? but "where are your furrows?" Not "how quickly will this capital reproduce itself?" but " . . . what substance will it furnish, good for life? what work construct, protective of life?" if none, its own reproduction is useless . . .[1]

Economists so minded see wealth in strange things. Anything that issues in more money is the sole criterion; to make what is saleable is to produce wealth; to invest in what will earn interest is the proper use of capital and its only end. Hence it is that the investment of capital in a munitions factory is productive of wealth, and the making of bayonets is productive of wealth. But the making of a garden produces nothing that can be sold; the investment of money in the decoration of a house will never bear "interest." To the same point, namely, that production of goods is for consumption, and that wealth is in those goods in so far as they can be consumed in making happy the lives

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[1] Ibid., pp. 98-102.

of men, Ruskin argues from the etymology of the word "value":

> . . . To be "valuable," therefore, is to "avail towards life." A truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength. In proportion as it does not lead to life, or as its strength is broken, it is less valuable in proportion as it leads away from life, it is unvaluable or malignant.[1]

And again:

> . . . it follows that if a thing is to be useful, it must be not only of an availing nature, but in availing hands. Or, in accurate terms, usefulness is value in the hands of the valiant; so that this science of wealth being, as we have just seen, when regarded as the science of Accumulation, accumulative of capacity as well as of material, when regarded as the Science of Distribution, is distribution not absolute, but discriminate; not of everything to every man, but of the right thing to the right man . . . Wealth, therefore, is "THE POSSESSION OF THE VALUABLE BY THE VALIANT."[2]

It is an easy criticism of the propositions put forward in this essay that they are too vague, that Ruskin's charge against the economists of his day is a playing with their words or a purely fantastic one, that the criterion of value he sets up is so general in its terms that it can mean anything and therefore means nothing. Such a criticism might well be justified if we are to look to Ruskin as an economist simply, and if we are to ask him for precise directions for governing the issue of the currency, for marketing the surplus of crops, for the control of industries and the prevention of monopolies. But he is not asked for these things; he comes to us now, not for study in our Schools of Business Administration, but for study in our classes

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[1] Ibid., pp. 83-85.

[2] Ibid., p. 88.

in Literature. Here we are asking for that higher wisdom that would be Philosophy were it not so much a matter of intuition, a matter of insight rather than scientific analysis, the wisdom of the poet, or better, of the saint, the wisdom that sees things in the light of eternal Truth and takes a view of them as parts of that Creation which was made to glorify its Creator. And this sort of wisdom Ruskin gives us; he turns to things which we say are matter for the economist; but he deals with them, exactly and fully as he can though probably with much error, yet with an insight or wisdom he has from his higher stand; and he does see down into some depths where apparently others can not.

That this talk of economic value consisting in what "avails for life" is not the mere dreaming of Ruskin and the intervention of his poetry into economics, becomes quite plain when Sections 32 and 33 of the Rerum Novarum are interpreted by Joseph Husslein, S. J. As Ruskin does, and as any Jesuit might follow St. Ignatius in beginning with the "First Principle and Foundation" that Man is made to praise, reverence, and serve God . . . and its corollary that all other creatures are to be used in so far as they contribute to this, Father Husslein explains:

> Applying to industry and commerce these imperative first principles of all human conduct, which nowhere may be set aside, it forthwith follows that no economic system can ever stand approved by us, whose supreme end is profit . . .
>
> A system of profits for profits' sake only must therefore be unconditionally condemned. It is the apotheosis of selfishness itself. The duty of every man and woman is to contribute to their neighbor's welfare, spiritually or materially, intellectually or

manually, domestically or industrially.[1]

As profit cannot be accepted as the sole motive of economic life, and the price that can be got for goods in the open market cannot be our sole criterion of value, so we are to look for a criterion of value in what "avails for life" as that, in turn, must avail for eternal life:

> . . . no employer, corporation, supertrust, or merger, no matter how powerful, may presume to outrage the human dignity of the worker, which as we know, "God Himself treats with reverence," nor yet may they stand in the way of the proper unfolding of that higher life in the laborer which is by far the most important of all and whose fruits of blessedness last on for eternity.
>
> More specifically to apply this truth we may say that the laborer is not to be worked, like a senseless brute, to the full of his physical capacity. He should be given the opportunity of leisure which is not only intended to recreate mind and body, but also to bring him back into contact with family life and cultural associations, and which above all other things should enable him to worship God, to keep in touch with the invisible, the supernatural, the Divine Source and Ultimate End of all his being.[2]

5.

After Ruskin

It might be objected that there has been presented here a very inadequate view of Ruskin's social teachings, that nothing has been said of his work with the St. George's Guild, his lectures to working men, and nothing of that vast mass of writing and the multitude of suggestion he proposed in it for the amelioration of the life of men, that this work has not even been

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[1] J. Husslein, The Christian Social Manifesto, pp. 165, 166.

[2] Ibid., pp. 161, 162.

summarized. But it is impossible to consider all that Ruskin did and talked of doing, and to weigh it; nor would any summary be just to him, as it must gloss over all those elements which enter into any particular and practical suggestions. Partly because Unto this Last is the most coherent of his social writings and suitable for class study, but chiefly because it embodies those ideas on the right ordering of social life which most coincide with Catholic principles - for these reasons the discussion has been limited to Ruskin's attack on the prevailing scheme of his day. It was the doctrine initiated by the "Physiocrats" of the eighteenth century, the doctrine of Adam Smith, Ricardo, Mill, of the Manchester School, sometimes called Liberalism, sometimes "Laissez-faire." That he did this, even as did the great Popes, Leo and Pius, makes him worthy of study. What mistakes he made can be brushed aside. His virtue is that against the world and at the cost of his reputation he laid down that "The great law which is to govern the production and distribution of wealth is the law of Co-operation . . . Government and Co-operation are the laws of Life; anarchy and competition are the laws of Death."

Benjamin Evans Lippincott says of Ruskin's final achievement:

> His teaching, according to Ernest Baker [Political Thought in England, 1840-1914] influenced the teaching of pure economics, Ruskin's advocacy, he says, of the economic ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon has helped to turn economists since the days of Jevons from the theory of production to the theory of consumption; it has helped to correct the old emphasis laid on saving, and to give more weight to spending; it has helped to modify the old conception of value as mainly determined by cost of production,

> and to give more consideration to utility as a factor in its creation.
>
> Ruskin's attack on the middle-class liberal state and the system of capitalism it sheltered helped to diminish the authority of both. His criticism, like Carlyle's, helped to undermine "laissez-faire" both in principle and in application.[1]

And Frederick Harrison, writing in 1902, perhaps too cheerfully, summarizes what he thinks had resulted already from Ruskin's teaching:

> The pedantic, pseudo-scientific Plutonomy, or Science of Wealth, which he denounced, is as dead as Alchemy or Phlogiston. His notion that economic prosperity is subordinate to the wellbeing of the people is the axiom of politicians as of philosophers. His idea that the wise use of wealth, the distribution of products, the health and happiness of the producers, come before the accumulation of wealth, is a commonplace, not of philanthropists, but of statesmen and journalists. His appeal for organization of industry, the suppression of public nuisances, and restriction of all anti-social abuses, is a truism to the reformers of today. So is much of what he said about national education long years before Mr. Forster, a bout old-age pensions long years before Mr. Chamberlain, about the housing of the working classes long years before the Statutes, Conferences and Royal Commissions of our own generation. Read all he says as to the necessity of training schools, technical schools, State supervision of practical and physical education, help to the unemployed, provision for the aged, the recovery of waste lands, the qualified ownership of the soil . . . read all these glancings of a keen and pure soul from heaven to earth on a multitude of things social and humane, and you will recognize how truly John Ruskin forty years ago was a pioneer of the things which today the best spirits of our time so earnestly yearn to see.[2]

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[1] Op. cit., pp. 58, 59.

[2] John Ruskin, pp. 107, 108.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that one conclusion can now be clearly drawn from this study of Ruskin: that the Catholic teacher of literature will find in the writings of John Ruskin a body of thought worthy of his teaching.

He will find not what too many critics claim to have found - an art criticism into which "morality" has been impertinently obtruded, that kind of morality which the Catholic teacher would reject as mere humanitarian cant, a matter of "proper feelings," a sentiment merely, without reason as its light and without any ultimate end worthy of man. He will find rather what other critics too vaguely realized as a way of life, a religious view of life of which Beauty and Art were but parts, yet integral parts.

He will find that supernatural, or Christian, view of life obscured by misunderstanding or forgetfulness of it, just as all Protestant England was forgetful of it and the supernatural life of the sacraments in its fulness, just as "liberal" and "humanitarian" England had forgotten all but the "personality" of Christ and His kindness, justice, and simplicity. Not knowing the fulness of the supernatural life of the Church, he did not teach a way of life that, studied only by itself, was in the strict sense supernatural.

But he will find that supernatural and Christian view of life when he sees Ruskin's teachings against the light of his own Faith. They fit in with all he believes, they complement it as the reasonings of the theologian enlarge on or clarify that which has been revealed. They are of the "atmosphere" of the Faith; they have it for "background," to use the jargon of the day.

The Catholic teacher will agree as he reads the words of Cardinal Manning to Ruskin of something which he had written: "Such flowers can grow in one soil alone. They can be found only in the Garden of Faith, over which the world of light hangs visibly."

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